

AT THE EDGE

Exploring new interpretations of past and place in archaeology, folklore and mythology

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The three destinies of Lleu Llaw Gyffes

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The Three Destinies of Llew Llaw Gyffes

In the different branches of Indo-European tradition, social structure is ritually legitimized in myth and religious observance, which reflect the Proto-Indo-European social organisation into three distinct strata, or as Georges Dumézil terms them, *functions*. The first function is usually termed 'sovereignty'; it relates to rule and the ritual maintenance of order. It can be sub-divided into the magico-religious and the temporal-judicial, represented socially by priests and kings respectively. The second function is concerned with defence and the imposition of order through physical force and is concerned with war-like activities, represented by fighters and military institutions. The third is concerned with fertility and prosperity, represented by cultivators and other producers of food and material goods, but also relating to sexuality, peace and beauty. The first function has an essential duality, and is thus often allocated in myth to two gods, usually brothers, and often twins: although sometimes one brother is displaced and supplanted by an older male relative. These three functions are inherent in Indo-European tradition, and appear to have been inherited from the Proto-Indo-European culture that spawned the rest.

This trifunctional structure can be found in many aspects of Indo-European culture. While it frankly reflects the social stratifications that occur in virtually every culture, among the Indo-Europeans it is formally codified in ritual and iconography and is pervasive to such an extent that it was described by Dumézil as an

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ideology, one that has shaped all subsequent Indo-European societies in its image [1]. Since Dumézil defined this structure, a number of studies - including significant contributions by Bruce Lincoln [2] and Emily Lyle [3] - have shown how it relates directly to the Indo-European image of the human body and the identification of human physique with the cosmos and its creation, and to the magical and religious traditions devoted to it.

The story of Llew Llaw Gyffes - preserved in *Math Vab Mathonwy*, the fourth 'branch' of the collection of medieval Welsh tales known as the *Mabinogion* - is directly related to this system. The life and adventures of Llew revolve around the three 'destinies' sworn upon him by his mother Arianhrod, and these encapsulate the trifunctional organisation of Indo-European culture. Not only are the three functions evident in this and other key episodes and motifs, but the structure of the narrative is itself determined by the trifunctional schema.

Llew's story begins about halfway through *Math Vab Mathonwy*. It follows on from the rape of Goewin by Gilfaethwy, aided by his brother Gwydion. Math, who had employed Goewin as footholder, now requires a new servant to perform the task, as his footholder must be a virgin. Gwydion proposes that his sister Arianhrod for the vacancy. Although she claims to be

chaste, she is tested by being made to step over a magic wand; as she does so, she drops a child, a boy who is baptised Dylan Eil Ton, 'Sea, son of Wave', who makes for the sea and swims away as soon as he is baptized. Arianhrod leaves the scene, but Gwydion sees that she has dropped something else, which he takes and secretes in a chest. Some time later, he hears a cry from within the chest. Opening it, he discovers a baby boy, who grows at a prodigious rate. When the boy has grown to the size of a man, Gwydion takes him to Caer Arianhrod, and presents him to his mother to be named. But Arianhrod is displeased, and swears that the boy is fated to remain nameless until she herself gives him a name.

Thanks to Gwydion's magic, Arianhrod is tricked into naming the boy Llew Llaw Gyffes ('the fair one with a steady hand'), whereupon she places another destiny on him - that he will never bear arms until she herself equips him. Gwydion again fools her into giving the boy his first arms, and this time she swears that he is destined not to have a wife of any race on earth. Gwydion and Math make Llew a wife from the blooms of oak, broom and meadow-sweet; she is given the name Blodeuedd ('flowers').

Gwydion urges Math to give Llew the rule of Cantref Dinoding, and for a while Llew and his bride live happily. Then

one day, while Lleu is away visiting Math, Blodeuedd sees Gronwy Pebyr out hunting, and quickly becomes his lover; the pair spend three nights together until Lleu returns. The lovers conspire to get rid of Lleu, and Blodeuedd discovers from him how he may be killed: neither in a house nor outside; neither on horseback nor on foot; and with a spear, worked on only during Mass on Sundays, that takes a year to manufacture. Blodeuedd has a bath set up on the bank of a river, with a thatched roof above it and a he-goat at its side. Meanwhile, Gronwy makes a spear according to the formula. Lleu then demonstrates his own death to oblige his wife. He is standing with one foot on the bath and one on the goat's back, with only the lower part of his body clothed, when Gronwy spears him. With a terrible cry, Lleu flies off in the shape of an eagle. Gwydion eventually tracks him to where he perches, in a sorry condition, at the top of an oak; the magician sings three *englynion*, and Lleu flies down to him in three stages, then returns to human form. Gwydion punishes Blodeuedd by turning her into an owl, and Gronwy flees. Lleu eventually takes his revenge by insisting that Gronwy should suffer no more nor less than what he was prepared to do to Lleu. Despite an attempt to find a substitute victim, and then being allowed to put a stone between himself and Lleu's spear, Gronwy is slain. Lleu then resumes his life, eventually becoming the ruler of Gwynedd [4].

A number of triadic groupings are immediately discernible in the story: the three destinies; the three types of flower used to create Blodeuedd; the three *englynion* sung by Gwydion, and the three stages by which Lleu descends from his oak. There are also the three nights Blodeuedd and Gronwy spend together when they first meet. Less obvious at first are two more - the magical conditions for Lleu's death, and the treacheries of Gronwy. As Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan has shown [5], the

Mabinogion contains a number of triadic structures determining plot and relationships within the various narratives; and Welsh tradition in general is preoccupied with triadic themes and groupings - for example, the well-known *Triads* [6]. *Math Vab Mathonwy* itself is divided into three clearly defined segments: the stealing of Pryderi's pigs; the transformations of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy; and the story of Lleu. The last section is further subdivided into three parts: Lleu's enigmatic birth; the imposition and solution of the three destinies; and his troubles with Blodeuedd and Gronwy. The romantic aspect of the story is the triangular relationship between Lleu, Blodeuedd and Gronwy. Clearly, *Lleu* - as we may term the third part of *Math Vab Mathonwy* - should be viewed in the context of traditional Welsh triadic structures; but in its constant reiteration of the idea of triplicity we may see a subtle reinforcement of underlying trifunctional themes.

The trifunctional structure is evident from the very beginning of Lleu's life. He is one of two brothers, the elder of whom takes to the sea as soon as he is baptised, and plays no further part in the story. This idea of two brothers, one of whom disappears from the scene leaving the other in the ascendant, is a common feature of the first function [7]; the reasons for this change from duality to singularity (and sometimes back again) is complex, but may relate to the changing social rôles of priest and king in diversifying Indo-European societies. In this case, Dylan is replaced in the pair by Gwydion the magician (ostensibly Lleu's uncle, but possibly also his father; the story is not clear on this point), who balances Lleu the secular ruler of *Cantref Dinoding* - he later becomes king over Dyfed - by giving him magical assistance.

Lleu is clearly marked as a first function figure, by rôle and by iconography (spear and eagle frequently denote kingship,

especially among the Celts and Germans). As such he should be expected to relate in some way to all three functions. A king and his society should be seen as reflections of one another; a king is not simply one who rules or acts on behalf of his people, but '*the very embodiment of the social totality*' [8]. In Irish tradition, for example, Lugaid of the Red Stripes is the son of three brothers who slept with their sister Clothru on a single night. Lugaid is born with red stripes around his neck and waist, which mark out his physical inheritance from the three fathers - his head resembles that of Nár ('noble'); his chest and arms are like those of Bres ('combat'); while from the waist down he resembles Lóthar ('washtub'). As their names indicate, each of his fathers represents one of the three functions, and from each he inherits the part of the body to which they are allocated [9]. Lleu's trifunctional nature is not illustrated quite so graphically. Instead of inheriting aspects of the three functions as a matter





of course, he has to acquire them, by overcoming - with the help of Gwydion - the three destinies imposed by Arianhrod. The destinies are that he will not have a name; that he will not have weapons; and that he will not have a wife. Here are the three functions, presented in their typical hierarchical order. The second and third are self-explanatory (war and sexuality), while the first is explicable, as Lloyd-Morgan has pointed out, in terms of knowledge (his name), so completing the set [10].

Arianhrod's motive is ostensibly sheer spite at being reminded of her embarrassment; but she actually seems to be playing a rôle similar to that of the character of the goddess Sovereignty in Irish tales. Although it is she who places upon Lleu the destinies that would prevent his assumption of kingship, it is still she who confers upon him the very qualities that he requires for that position. It is significant that it is only after the resolution of the third destiny that Lleu is given the rule of Cantref Dinoding. Blodeuedd, as bride of the king-to-be, can also be seen as a version of Sovereignty, the trifunctional goddess who represents the social totality, to whom the king is symbolically married. She is created from three different kinds of flower, which hint perhaps at some kind of hierarchy imposed upon the vegetable kingdom: tree (oak), shrub (broom), and meadow-plant (meadow-sweet). It is possible that the colours of the three flowers may have been

envisaged as the three colours associated with the three functions in Indo-European tradition - white for the first, red for the second, and blue, green or black for the third [11]. This would perhaps depend on our correctly identifying the species and gender of the plants in question, and knowing which parts of Blodeuedd's body were made of which flower; but *Math Vab Mathonwy* tells us nothing that would be of use in this respect.

Celtic tradition does have a three-coloured ideal of physical beauty, a combination of red, white, and black - in *Peredur* and the story of Deirdre, for instance [12]. Although the references are to physical beauty, it may be the case that the three colours do relate to the three functions by symbolising a balance or harmony of their respective characteristics - intelligence, strength, and sexual attractiveness. Blodeuedd is said to be 'the very fairest and best endowed maiden that mortal ever saw'. On the other hand, Irish tradition refers to Sovereignty in terms of three colours that appear to relate to the land and its vegetation, and that correspond broadly with the colours assigned to the three functions [13].

If Lleu becomes a ruler by overcoming the restrictions of his three destinies - that is, by acquiring the attributes and becoming an embodiment of all three functions - then he is done away with by having them undone. While Arianhrod represents the Sovereignty presiding over their acquisition, Blodeuedd presides over their dissolution. Lleu tells Blodeuedd that he can only be killed under certain conditions: neither in nor out of a house, neither on horseback nor on foot, and with a spear made during Sunday Mass over a period of one year. But there is more to it: 'he arose out of the bath and put on his breeks, and he placed one foot on the edge of the tub and the other on the he-goat's back. Then Gronw [sic] rose up...and smote him in the side' [14]. As

Lleu has specified, the bath is under a thatched cover. It is also worth noting that this episode takes place on a river-bank.

In a sense, Lleu's death is made possible by 'unmaking' each of the three functions contained in his person. The first function may here be represented by the house, symbolic of the ordered cosmos, and personal identity; the second is represented by the horse, or rather its absence; while the third is represented by the bathtub. Second and third functions are duplicated in the state of Lleu's dress - his chest and arms are bared, and thus vulnerable, whereas his lower body is covered, so reducing his sexuality. The spear is both a first function symbol and a second function object manufactured under magical conditions; as a symbol it also has well-known phallic (second function) connotations. It is in a sense the key that completes the undoing of the functions personified by Lleu.

It is true that this functional analysis of Lleu's temporary murder rests overmuch on conjecture on supposition; but it is clear that, as the circumstances of his 'death' show, Lleu is placed in a dangerously ambiguous position, his status indefinable. He is neither indoors nor out; neither on horseback nor on foot; neither clothed nor naked. What is more, he balances on the edge of the bath, and the murder attempt takes place on a river-bank, at the boundary between water and land. Even the weapon used is made only when everyday activity is suspended and a magical transformation - the Mass - is occurring. As Mary Douglas remarks, danger 'lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one state to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others' [15]. Lleu is in a thoroughly liminal state, and the things that

hold his kingship together fly apart when the spear is cast, leaving only the eagle, a symbol of what he once was.

Gronwy's actions correspond to another Indo-European motif identified by Dumézil as the 'three sins of the warrior' [16]. These sins, successive transgressions against representations of each of the three functions, are also found in the careers of Indra, Heracles, and Starkaðr. Indra's three sins are: involvement in the killing of a Brahmin (first function); using his physical force in a cowardly way (second function); and an adulterous rape (third function). In the case of Heracles, the equivalent sins are the murder of his children in a fit of rage after the Delphic oracle repeated the command of Zeus concerning the twelve labours; the cowardly murder of the son of Eurytos; and the desertion of his wife, followed by rape. As for Starkaðr, the sin against the first function is regicide; he then displays cowardice, resulting in the loss of a war; and finally he commits regicide again, for money, an aspect of the third function [17]. In each case, the sins result in a loss of some kind. Indra loses first his *tejah*, spiritual force, then his physical force, then his beauty, each loss relating to the function he has sinned against. Heracles slides further down the social ladder with each crime - he is reduced to a labourer, then a slave, and finally he is killed. Starkaðr loses one of his three lives after each evil deed. The 'three sins of the warrior' are clearly observable in Gronwy. Firstly, his adulterous liaison with Blodeuedd is easily linked to the third function. Next, the cowardly manner in which he despatches Lleu is matched by his attempt to find a substitute to die in his place; and even when he does finally submit to Lleu's demand he insists upon having a barrier placed between himself and Lleu. Thus he sins against the second function. Finally, Gronwy's sin against the first function is twofold -

regicide and usurpation. Again, there is the element of loss: first Blodeuedd is taken from him, then he loses his life [18].

The three functions are all invoked to begin Lleu's rule, and - perhaps - again to terminate it, albeit on a temporary basis. The character responsible for the nearly-fatal blow is also connected with all three functions, and there are grounds for believing that his ally is also so connected. It is also tempting to see the same pattern in the three *englynion* with which Gwydion brings Lleu back to the human realm, though that may be stretching the point too far. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how the Indo-European trifunctional tradition has influenced the structure of the story, perhaps even being the prime determinant. It is difficult to decide whether this is the result of deliberation on the part of the redactor, utilising recurrent traditional motifs to structure the narrative in a form recognisable to the likely audience; or whether, as Dumézil might have suggested, the common Indo-European linguistic and ideological heritage found a natural expression here, as it appears to have done in other Indo-European epics and myths. Certainly, the trifunctional pattern has been discerned in Celtic material by Dumézil and others, so its presence in the story of Lleu is by no means an isolated instance [19].

References

- 1: The trifunctional pattern is by no means universally accepted, but it now forms the basis for much of the more influential work being done in the field of comparative mythology. For a useful introduction, see: C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, University of California Press, 1982.
- 2: Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society*, Harvard University Press, 1986.
- 3: Emily Lyle, *Archaic Cosmos*, Polygon, 1991.
- 4: Gwyn Jones and Thomas

Jones (trans.), *The Mabinogion*, Everyman 1949, p63-75.

- 5: Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Triadic structures in the four branches of the Mabinogi', in *Shadow* Vol.5 No.1 (June 1988).
- 6: Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, University of Wales Press, 1978.
- 7: Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna*, Zone Books, 1988.
- 8: Lincoln, op. cit. p163.
- 9: Ibid. p159-61.
- 10: In her essay Lloyd-Morgan notes in passing the correspondence of the three destinies with the Indo-European social tripartition, but does not pursue the matter.
- 11: Georges Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, University of California Press, 1973, p124-5.
- 12: *The Mabinogion*, p. 199; 'The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu', in Jeffrey Gantz (trans.), *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, Penguin Classics 1981, p260.
- 13: Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, Thames and Hudson 1961, p73-5.
- 14: *The Mabinogion*, op. cit. p71.
- 15: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, p96.
- 16: Littleton, op. cit. p123-7; Georges Dumézil, *The Stakes of the Warrior*, University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- 17: Interestingly, Starkaðr murders Olo while the latter is bathing. A more striking parallel to Lleu's death can be found in the murder of Agamemnon, as told by Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*: not only is Agamemnon slain by his wife's lover while half-in and half-out of a bath, but he is covered with a garment of netting by his wife Clytemnaestra - in other words, he is neither clothed nor unclothed.
- 18: Lleu's Irish counterpart Lug is involved in a similar love-triangle, ended when he kills his wife's lover.
- 19: See, for example, Rees and Rees (op. cit.): Marie-Louise Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, (1949; reprinted Turtle Island, 1982). Other scholars who have applied the Dumézilian formula to Celtic tradition include Joseph Nagy, Jan De Vries, and Patrick K. Ford.

LATVIANS

their origins and place in old Europe

In the first part of my article I should like to introduce readers briefly to the Balts, especially Latvians, and their origins, culture and place in old Europe. Balts, Latvians, Lithuanians - these are words which mean nothing for most people today. If they know that they all live near the Baltic Sea then that is already very much! The reasons for this ignorance are various - 700 years of subordination under Germans, Poles, Swedes and Russians who all have tried to inculcate the opinion that the Baltic folk are rough barbarians without any culture worth considering. Of course, the 50 year occupation of the Baltic states by Soviets has separated them from the other Europe and its cultural life. It is important for all of us to become acquainted with each other again, as we were thousands of years ago. Celts, Germans, Balts and others are members of one family that is termed 'Indo-European'.

Today, all over Europe people have to try to maintain the living fragments of their traditional cultures or renew the lost parts. Today, some people have understood that what some call 'progress' is disposability. We must make the best use of that cultural and spiritual wealth that members of the Indo-European family share. The Baltic cultural heritage is especially important as much can be attributed directly to Proto-Indo-European origins.

Before readers say I am too

Valtars Grivins lives in Valmieras, a town in north-east Latvia. He has been researching the traditional beliefs and archaeological sites of his country for about four years. He has become concerned about the way megalithic sites and ancient rock engravings are being damaged or destroyed so is attempting to draw attention to this problem in his own country and, as with the example of this article, by trying to enhance awareness in western Europe of this little-known but rich inheritance.

self-opinionated, similar words have been said already.

S.K. Chatterji, National Professor of India in Humanities, wrote: 'An ancient pre-Christian, or in other words, purely Indo-European tradition undoubtedly has come to us intact in the language and literature of the Balts.' [1] A French professor of philology, A. Meillet, notes: 'Before being flanked by the German peoples from one side and the Slav peoples on the other, the Baltic language carriers have performed their historic role. The Baltic people - Lithuanians and Latvians - possess the oldest civilisation in Europe that is more ancient than the Greek and Roman civilisation.' [2] It could be added that the Balts have not yet completed their entire historic role. Who knows, maybe at present their role is even more decisive than in the ancient times?

What has survived of this ancient civilisation? One aspect is the Latvian folklore - a collection of about 3,300,000 items in total. It is divided into the following categories:

- 1: Dainas (Latvian songs of endearment or Latvian holy songs) - about 1,250,000
- 2: Riddles - about 530,000
- 3: Beliefs - about 400,000
- 4: Proverbs and sayings - about 300,000
- 5: Legends - about 60,000
- 6: Magic words or spells - about 55,000
- 7: Fairy tales - about 40,000
- 8: Folk melodies - more than 30,000
- 9: Folk dances - about 25,000

This vast Latvian spiritual heritage, where Christian overlays form a very small part, is rather like a well of wisdom to drink from. It is not forbidden to any body, but it is not easy to do because of the 'remote' location and gossip about the quality of the water!

The same words can be said about the material witnesses of the Balts' ancient culture - the holy places. One of these is described below. But, before reaching for the origins of the Balts, Table 1 shows a few words from Latvian and English which have common roots in very remote times.

Table 1

Words with similar meanings in Latvian and English.

For Latvian words which have only a distant relationship with the English counterpart, the modern Latvian is given in []. Some of the English words are themselves more-or-less archaic and confirms the deep 'roots'. There are many more related words but these fifty are enough to provide an insight.

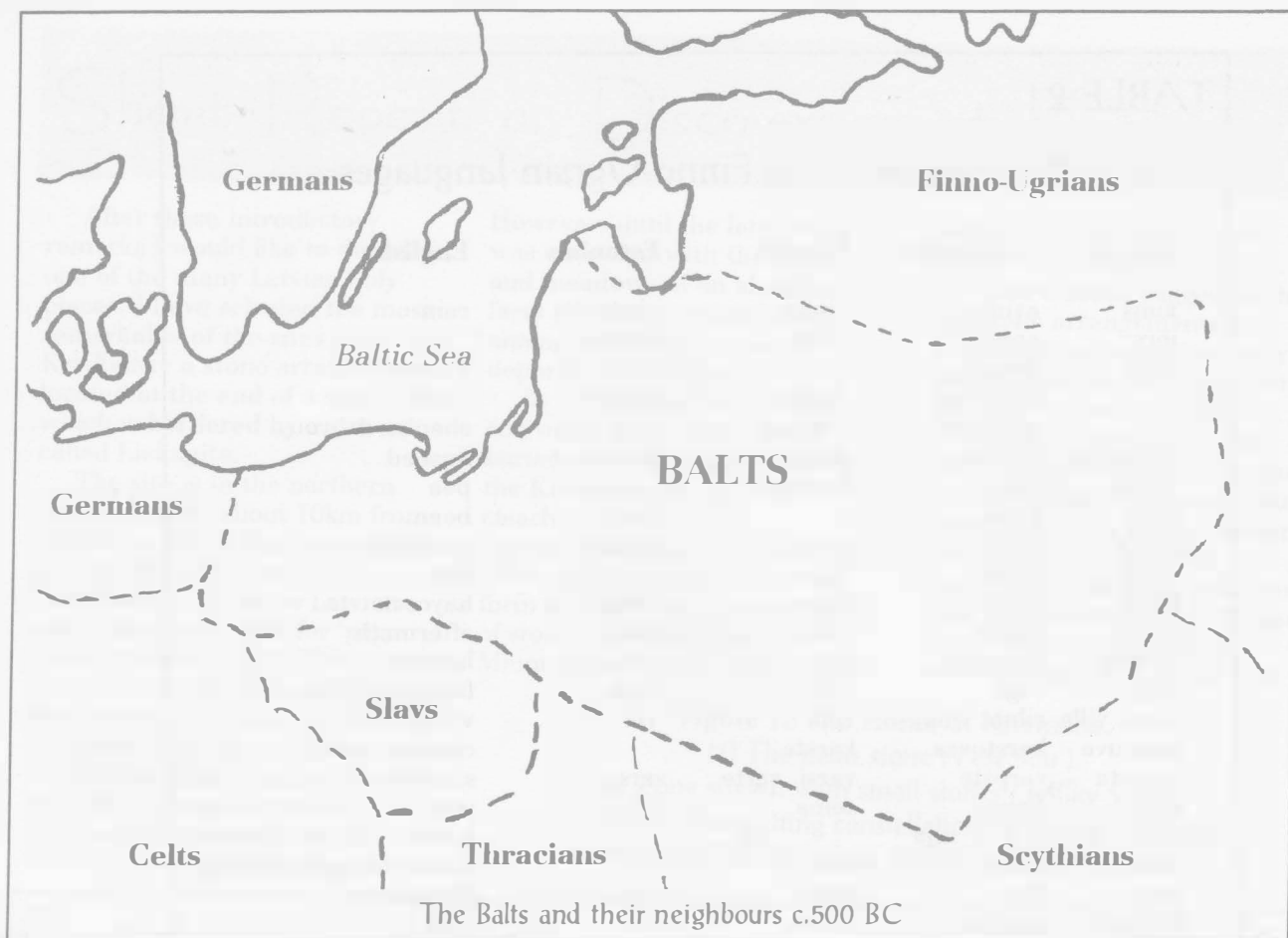
varas	word
barda	beard
otrs	other
pils [castle]	pile
also pile [archaism for castle]	
pelt [to blame]	pelt
berns	bairn
duna [soft feathers]	down
podas	pot
panna	pan
katls	kettle
kanna	can
brinkis [archaism for bank or edge]	brink
viltiba	wile
vedibas [archaism]	wedding
apgerbs; gerbs	garb
dievains; dievajs...	divine
partika [provisions, food]	partake
velks [archaism for wound]	whelk
[archaic dialect usage derived from Old English <i>hwylca</i> 'pustule']	
riba	rib
gaita	gait
rite; norite	rite
gravis [ditch]	grave
miseklis	miss
mina; atmina [understanding; memory]	mind
dole	dole
durvis; duris	door
slidet	slide
strengs	string
dikis [pond]	dike
duini [smoke]	dim
meita	maid
vinda	wind
striks	streak
ruds	ruddy
bruns	brown
rumpis	rump
sedli	saddle
skandet [scan poetry or songs]	scan
skrapis	scraper
siners; sinere	sinear
balkis [beam]	balk
bullis	bull
krampis	cramp
kums	chum
krass [sudden; sharp]	crass
dulls	dull
lupata	lappet
masts	mast
noplis	napless

To look for the origins of the Balts we must go back to the end of the last Ice Age when about 10,000 or 11,000 years ago the first newcomers from north-west and middle Europe arrived at the Baltic coasts. These were people of Swidry [3] and Baltic Magdalenian cultures. Archaeologically, we can trace an uninterrupted continuity of those peoples through to the late Neolithic when, about 2,400 BC, Corded Ware and Battle-Axe culture appears at the Baltic Sea. Most academics consider that the people who brought Corded Ware culture to the Baltic were newcomers. This means that the Balts arrived in the Baltic in the third millennium BC.

However, some prominent Latvian archaeologists have propounded an alternative theory. Their research suggests that Corded Ware does not represent an influx of new people but, rather, the change in culture from hunter-gathering to agriculture and stock rearing that might have itself resulted from changes in climate during the third millennium. This gives added credence to the ideas of Maillet given above, who was writing in the 1930s, before archaeology and philology were so mutually supportive.

It must be understood that present-day Lithuania and Latvia are only a small part of the territory which was originally occupied by the Balts. Baltic words are used for the names of rivers and lakes over a wide area - from the Finnish gulf in the north to modern-day Kiev in the south, and from Moscow in the east to Berlin in the west. A good example is the River Volga. Thought by most people to be originally Russian, some linguists (including Russians) think that the name 'Volga' is derived from the Baltic name 'jilga' which means 'long river' [4]. Later it was transformed by East Slavs into *Julga* and by the seventh or eighth century AD into 'Volga'.

The prevalence of the Baltic cultures in eastern Europe from about 5,000 to 2,500 BC was



steadily reduced. The map shows the territory inhabited by the ancient Balts around 500 BC. The mutual exchange of culture with Celts, Slavs, Germans, Thracians, Scythians and Finno-Ugrian peoples is a theme for at least one book. Of note, however, is the contribution of the Balts to the Finno-Ugrians, especially in the fields of religion and agriculture. Comparative linguistics has revealed that many Finno-Ugric words connected with religion and agriculture are loaned from the Baltic languages (see Table 2). This proves that agriculture, cattle-breeding and the building of overground dwellings were all adopted by Finno-Ugrians from Baltic precedents. Close relations were maintained with the Indo-European peoples. Trade in amber and articles made from amber was undoubtedly one of the main 'engines' of cultural exchange at this time.

The geographical borders of the Balts shown in the map did

not change until the sixth century AD when, after the fall of the Gothic empire (located in the modern Ukraine) at the hands of the Huns, the East Slavs became free instead of being enslaved by the Goths. The East Slavs started to migrate to safer and more peaceful places. At the same time the Western Slavs also started to move out of their territories (present-day Poland). Unfortunately for the Balts, their lands were subject to Slav invasions; between the sixth and twelfth centuries the East Balts were subdued by the Slavs.

Some of the Balts were assimilated and stayed to live together with the Slavs. Some struggled against them until the twelfth century but then retreated to the old Baltic lands nearer the coast. Thus by the thirteenth century the heartland of the Balts, a stronghold of old European culture, had been reduced to approximately the extent of modern-day Latvia, Lithuania and East Prussia (now the Kaliningrad region of Russia).

Nevertheless Lithuania became one of the greatest European states in the fourteenth century. The Grand Dukedom of Lithuania spread out from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. I shall not analyse the reasons why Balts lost their independence in the later middle ages and became a 'ghost kingdom'. Not without reason the Balts were the last 'pagans' in Europe; invasions by various Christian states led to a loss of political independence. But, despite this, the Balts did not lose their national culture and religion.

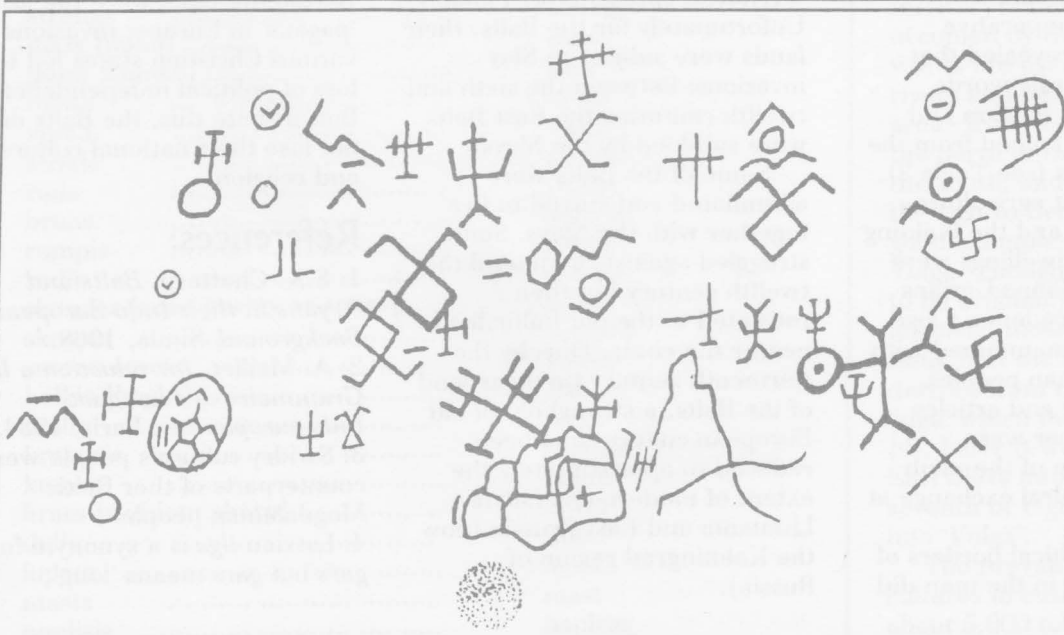
References:

- 1: S.K. Chatterji, *Balts and Aryans in their Indo-European Background*, Simla, 1968.
- 2: A. Meillet, *Introduction a la Grammaire des Langues Indo-europiennes*, Paris, 1934.
- 3: Swidry culture's people were counterparts of their Baltic Magdalenian people.
- 4: Latvian *ilgs* is a synonym for *gars* but *gars* means 'long'.

TABLE 2

Some Baltic loan words in Finno-Ugrian languages

Latvian	Lithuanian	Finnish	Estonian	English
auns	avinas	oinas	oinas	ram
jers	eras	jäärä	jäär	
zirgs	zirgas			horse
	<i>becomes</i>	härkä	härg	bull
	piemens	paimen		shepherd
lin-seklas	semens	siemen	seeme	linseed
zirnis	zirnis	herene		pea
pupa	pupa		uba	bean
putra	putra	puuro	putro	porridge
siens	sienas	heina		hay
guba	guba	kupo	kubu	haycock
atals	atolas	hädal	ädal	aftermath
ecesas	ekecius	äes	äes	harrow
vaga	vaga	vaka	vagu	furrow
vilna, villa	vilna, villa	villa	vill	wool
karstuve	karstuvas	karsta		carding mill
varpsta	verpste	varsi, varte	vars	spindle
siena	siena	seina	sein	wall
sija	sija	sii		girder
ards	ardas	orsi	ors	beams for grain drying
lava	lova	lava	lava	plank bed
stiebers	stiebas	seivas		stalk
darzs	darzas	tarha		garden
darva	terva	terva		tar
	zambas			corner, edge
	<i>becomes</i>	sammas, sampas		border mark, post
tilts	tiltas	silta	sild	bridge
ragavas	roges	reki	regi	sled
durklis	dura	tuura		bayonet
tacis	takisas	toe	toge	weir
perkons	perkunas	perkele	pergel	thunder
dievs	deivas	taivas		shining sky
pukis			puuk	dragon
kokle	kankles	kantele	kannel	musical instrument



Left:
Petroglyphs
found in 1986
on the bank of
the River Brasla
(with cup mark,
bottom centre)

Short Report on Discoveries at Krivkalns

After these introductory remarks I would like to describe one of the many Latvian holy places. I have selected the most remarkable of the sites - the Krivkalns - a stone arrangement located at the end of a small hill which is bordered by a stream called Liekūpīte.

The site is in the northern part of Latvia, about 10km from Valmiera. Krivkalns translates as 'The Hill of Priests' (Krivkalns = *Krīvs* the Latvian and Lithuanian word for 'pagan priest' + *kalns*, 'hill'). This place-name was that used by the last owner of the farm on which it stands when he met the researcher Ojars Ozolins. Today the hill is overgrown with bushes and trees and merges with the surrounding forest.

However, until the late 1960s it was encircled with the fields and meadows of an abandoned farm (the last owners being among the many Latvians deported to Siberia.)

In 1986 a skull of a he-goat and other items were found buried at a significant stone in the Krivkalns arrangement - clearly a sacrifice. A topographical survey in autumn 1986 revealed that five stones form a 'cross' and another group of stones resemble the Ursa Minor (Little Bear) constellation

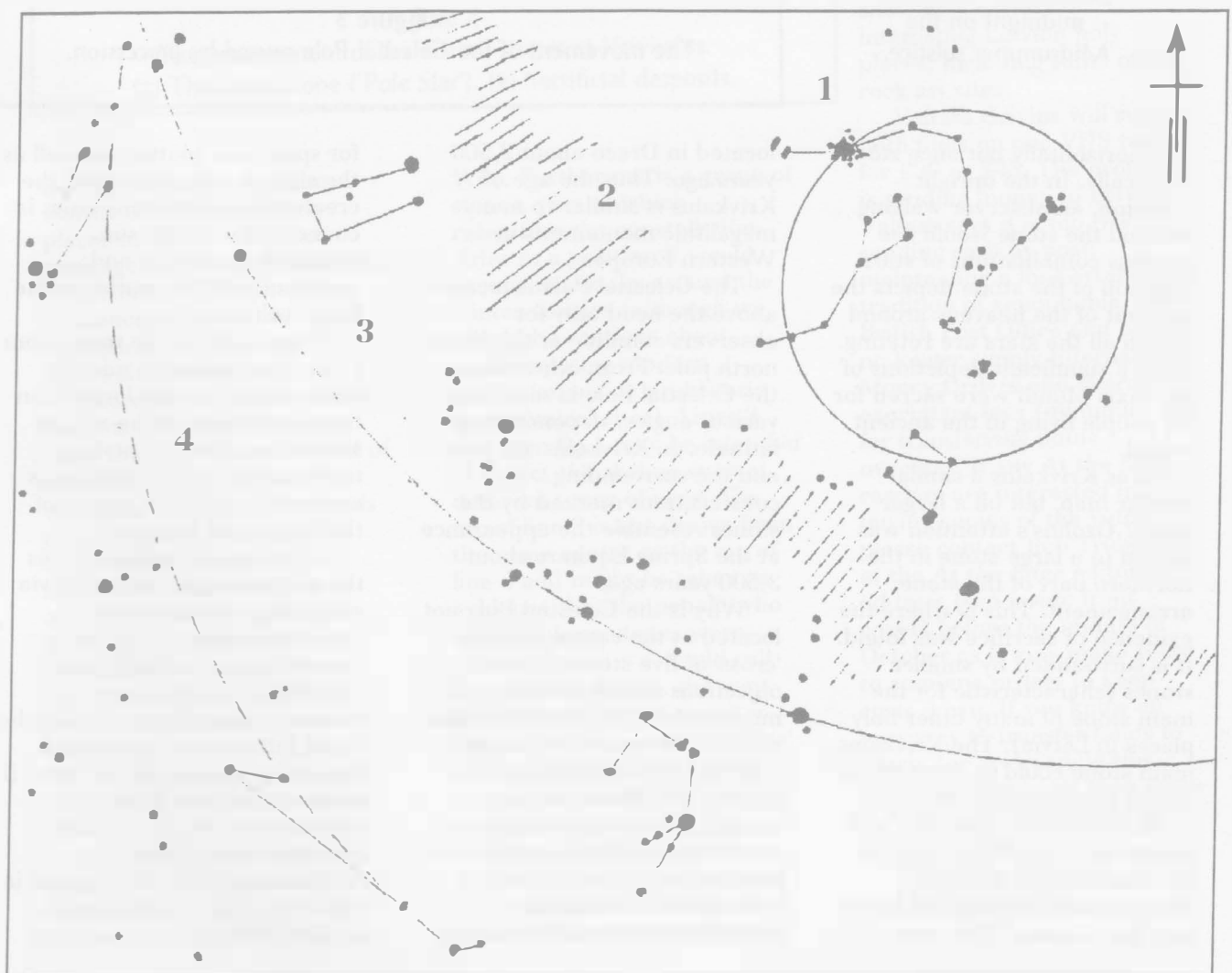
(which includes the modern pole star, Polaris); see fig. 1.

Ojars Ozolins suggested that the stone arrangements at Krivkalns are an ancient holy place connected with the stars and other celestial bodies.

Stellar symbols have not been recognised yet in Latvian rock art (engraved stones) but have been observed in similar Lithuanian rock art. The four-sided stone from the Utena region of Lithuania (fig. 2) also shows the stars nearest the celestial pole. This stone now

Figure 1.: The stones at Krivkalns.

- (1) The main stone ('Pole Star').
- (2) Zone strewn with small stones ('Milky Way').
- (3) Border (non-setting constellations at Spring Equinox).
- (4) Constellations below skyline at Spring Equinox.



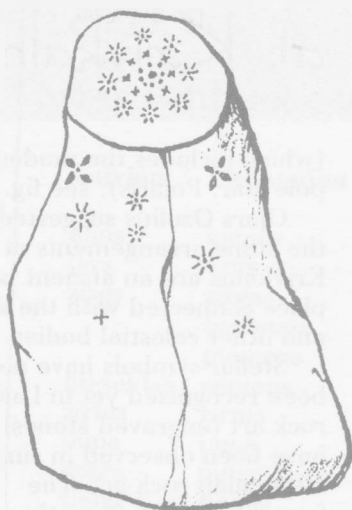


Figure 2
Four-sided stone with engraved stars. Near Sumini, (Utena region of Latvia). Drawing looking to north - Ursa Minor (the stars shown) occupies this position in the sky at midnight on the Midsummer solstice.

lies horizontally but once stood vertically. In the upright position, an observer walking around the stone would see various combinations of stars. The top of the stone depicts the summit of the heavens around which all the stars are rotating. Such a significant depictions of the Axis Mundi were sacred for all people living in the ancient world.

Was Krivkalns a similar 'stellar map' but on a larger scale? Ozolins's attention was drawn to a large stone in the northern part of the stone arrangement. This is where the evidence of sacrifice was found. It is surrounded by smaller stones (characteristic for the main stone of many other holy places in Latvia). The Krivkalns main stone could be intended to depict the Celestial Pole.

As we can see from fig. 4, it fits in with one of the stars of the constellation Draco. Astronomical calculations show that the Celestial Pole was

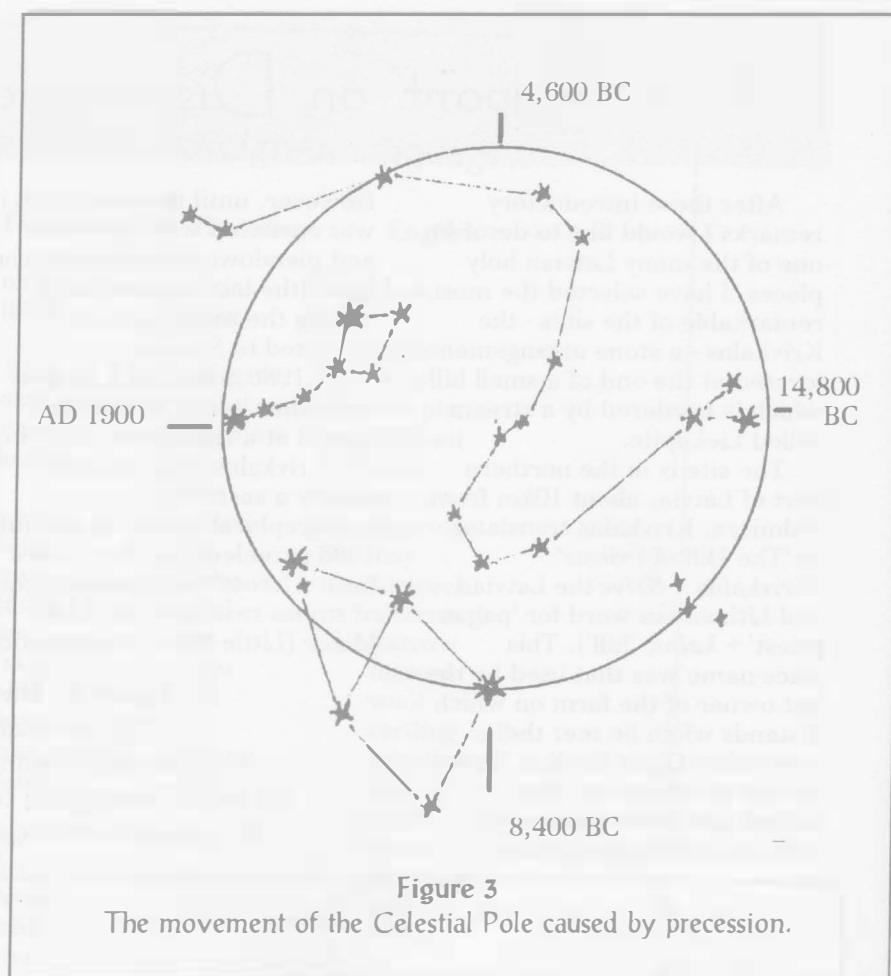


Figure 3
The movement of the Celestial Pole caused by precession.

located in Draco about 3,500 years ago. Thus the age of Krivkalns is similar to many megalithic monuments in Western Europe.

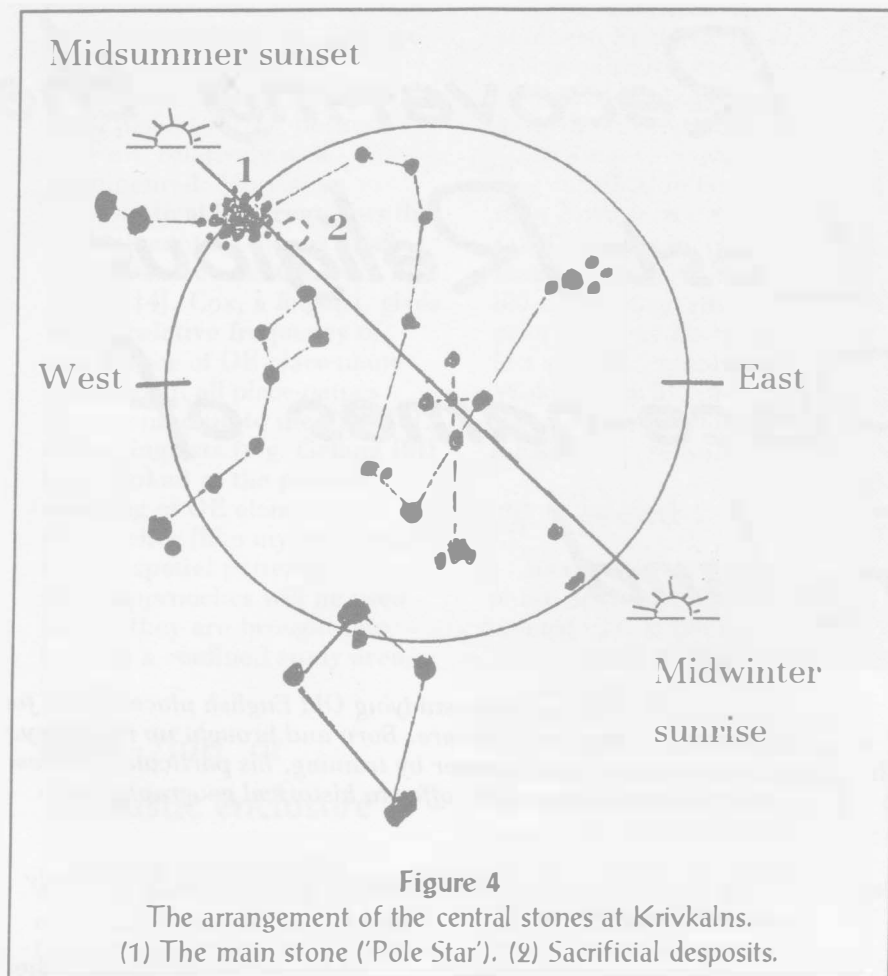
The Celestial Pole is located above the head only for observers standing at the Earth's north pole. From other places the Celestial Pole is seen from various angles, depending on latitude. In Krivkalns the pole and the surrounding constellations marked by the stones resemble the appearance at the Spring Equinox about 3,500 years ago.

Why is the Celestial Pole not located at the centre of the 'cross' of five stones? Such objections merely reflect modern thinking. The Krivkalns arrangements are not a direct reproduction of the night sky. Rather, the stones embody ancient holy laws evoked for sacred and magical purposes to bind 'our' world with the Universe. In the ancient symbolism the cross is the sign

for space and matter, as well as the sign of creation and/or the creator. The Krivkalns cross is connected with the sun, regarded as creator and maintainer of the world, in the Balts' culture.

If we stand at the main stone (Pole Star) then the middle stone of the cross is located on the line of sight to the winter solstice sunrise. In Latvian tradition the winter solstice is connected with the rebirth of the world and the sun.

Of course, if Krivkalns was the only arrangement in Latvia suggesting astronomical knowledge among ancient people then we should have doubts. But many other monuments and holy hills can be found in Latvia with traces of similar interest in the heavens (I hope to return to these in a future article for *At the Edge*). Research shows that many Latvian megaliths are situated in ways that point to significant stellar events, the sun's return



for a new circuit over the world. Of all ancient holy places in Latvia which are envisaged as being linked with the rebirth and further existence of the world, Krivkalns has the most expressive portrayal.

There could be very serious reasons why our forebears were thinking about the end of the world. The climate was changing and the water levels rising; anyone watching the heavens accurately for a number of years would be aware of complex oscillatory movements. Were ancient peoples attempting to return the celestial bodies to their previous ways and prevent the end of the world? This could be one of the basic purposes behind the megalith builders' labour-consuming work.

Returning to the map of Krivkalns. The area shown with hatched lines approximates to the Milky

Way. Further out is a group of stones, part of which resembles the constellation Aries in a position it would occupy in the sky around the winter solstice (although we should be cautious about superimposing modern constellations on prehistoric astronomical sites). Lines 3 and 4 on fig.1 may be intended to depict the skyline stars at different times of year. The arc of line 3 is not drawn from the same centre as the arc of line 4 and might be taken as evidence that the people who laid out these stones were aware of what we would call the ecliptic, that is, the way the stars varying in position because of the annual 'wobble' of the Earth which gives the varying day length between winter and summer.

This is simply a concise description of the key aspects of Krivkalns and there is much else which has been omitted.

The World Hill and the World Tree are basic principles of expression for Baltic peoples and are expressed in place-names, rock art ideograms and the layout of holy places. I hope readers have enjoyed the ideas described in this article and have some new ideas about Baltic archaeology and traditions.

End Note

A professionally-produced video, *The Way of the Sun*, showing Ojars Ozolins several stone arrangements and holy hills where he describes the stones and their astronomical significance is available from Valtars Grivins. It is on VHS (in UK PAL format) and overdubbed in English. Also available is *The Land of Eight Seasons*. This is a less-professionally produced video (with English subtitles) showing a variety of interesting Latvian holy places, including some of the rock art sites.

Valtars Grivins will supply both films on one VHS tape for £30 or \$45. The problem is sending money to Latvia. Valtars says it is too risky sending cash by post; maintaining a long-established tradition of xenophobia, the British Post Office and banks no longer supply International Money Orders and charge exorbitant fees (minimum £8) for transferring funds overseas. If any *At the Edge* readers are interested in buying copies of the video please contact Bob Trubshaw at the *At the Edge* editorial address (see inside front cover) before the middle of October as it may make sense to combine orders to keep costs down. If you know an easy way to transfer funds to Latvia (or are reading this after mid-October!) then write to Valtars Grivins direct at:

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Recovering the Lost Religious Place-names of England

Why, apparently, are religious beliefs so little reflected in the earliest English place-names? Openly religious Old English (OE) place-names - St Albans, Whitchurch, Axminster - are rare. Yet Wales at this period is full of *llan* names commemorating the activities of peripatetic ecclesiastics. Was England by comparison really so secular? Or is it that the religious content of early place-names has simply been disguised and forgotten?

Seventh-century place-names

It would be difficult to overstate the role played by religion in the England of the Dark Ages. At least two kings, Sigeberht of East Anglia (circa 630-7) and Caedwalla of Wessex (680s), abdicated to become penitents. And in this same period, the seventh century - because of the emergence of a common language, English, but also, I would argue, because of the increasing administrative centralism of the Church - the basis of English place-naming was laid down. Thus the charters and boundary lists of two religious establishments in Surrey, Chertsey Abbey and the minster at Farnham, believed to

GAVIN SMITH has been studying Old English place-names for ten years, in between childcare. Born and brought up in Surrey, and a geographer and planner by training, his particular interest is the evidence place-names offer to historical geography and cultural history.

The following notes are an up-dated version of a fuller study available from the writer.

be genuine seventh century documents, contain at this early date a whole set of typical OE place-name elements including -ingas, -ham, -hyth, -brycg, burh, -eg, -ford, -leah, -feld (today's -ing, -ham, -hythe, -bridge, bury, -ey, ford, -ley, -field) [1].

Most of our knowledge of the earliest OE place-names comes from ecclesiastical charters, so we might expect to find some religious content. Is it there? And if we find it, what is its significance? Two outcomes might be hoped for. First, do we find that a good proportion of the names of religious or cultural centres might be reinterpreted to reveal a religious meaning? The answer, I suggest, is yes. Glastonbury, Canterbury, Chertsey, Wells, Lincoln, Lichfield, Sherborne, Bristol, Windsor, all will be claimed as examples. Second, is there a chance that place-names might reveal lost archaeological sites? This is something of a holy grail for place-name students, who (rightly) have

received a hard time for their troubles from sceptical archaeologists. Care is advised. A place-name fixes neither a geographical site nor a date of first occupation. But there is the prospect, to take one example, that place-names may provide the 'other trace' that identifies Stenton's 'ancient parish churches, actually early monasteries which have disappeared without other trace' [2].

There is also the prospect that pagan religious activity underlying Christian sites may be identified, so helping us to understand the mechanics behind the Pope's recommendation to Mellitus, first bishop at St Paul's in London in 604, that existing pagan sites be co-opted [3]. The Pope anyway was following standard Roman Empire practice (under the Empire the god worshipped at Bath was 'Sulis Minerva').

So, let us look at religious activity in the seventh century, and see whether any OE

place-name elements might be linked to parts of it. Monasteries and minsters are a good place to start, because they are relatively well documented. Morris, an ecclesiastical historian, lists the seventh century names of all churches documented from that period [4]. Cox, a linguist, gives us the relative frequency of occurrence of OE place-name elements in all place-names documented up to the 730s [5]. Other linguists (e.g. Gelling [6]) have looked at the possible meaning of OE elements. A geographer (like myself) would look at spatial patterns. All these approaches will be used below; they are brought into focus in a confined study area, Surrey.

burh - 'fort' or 'monastic enclosure'

Most promising is OE element *burh*, found in the names of monasteries including Glastonbury, Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough, Canterbury, Malmesbury, and significantly in *Paulus byrig aet Lundaenae* for St Paul's in London. Three of these names clearly mean 'the *burh* dedicated to saint Edmund/Peter/Paul'.

It does look likely that to the accepted meanings of *burh* as 'Iron Age hill-fort, Roman town, fort, manor, borough' we must add 'monastic enclosure'. Canterbury could thus either be 'the cathedral' or 'the fort' of the people of Kent. Such would be consistent with Caradoc's use of *urbs* (town) for Glastonbury, and Bede's statement that the great Welsh monastery of Bangor Iscoed (some of these religious establishments held thousands of people) 'is called by the English Bancornaburg'. Ekwall interprets the first part of Malmesbury Abbey's name to be an amalgamation of the names of two of its famous abbots, Maildulf its Irish founder, and the later English Aldhelm. Equally interesting is Barker's thesis of a series of lost Celtic monasteries (*llan*) in

southern England, several of whose putative sites have *burh* names (Ramsbury, Amesbury, Westbury, Charlbury) [7].

In Surrey, Newark Priory was called Aldebury (1204) and then *Novo loco de Andebir* (1210), i.e. 'new place (Newark means 'new building') for the old *burh*', suggesting to me the priory may be successor to the lost seventh century minster of Woking nearby. Blair reached the same conclusion, although for different reasons [8].

eg - 'island'

Increasingly, a Celtic earlier phase of several English monasteries is not in dispute. The rights of existing Celtic establishments at Glastonbury and Abingdon were restated by their Anglo-Saxon conquerors [9]. And here the OE element *eg* ('island') seems relevant. It occurs, like *burh*, in many monastic names including Chertsey, Ramsey, Romsey, Selsey, Bardney, Athelney, Thorney (Cambs, but also the site of Westminster Abbey). *Eg* is found also in archaic forms of some monastic names:

Glastingei (Glastonbury), *Laestingaeu* (Lasteringham), *Heruteu* (Hartlepool). Parallels to English *eg* would seem to be Welsh *ynys* ('island'), as in *Ynys Pyr* (Caldey Island, 'the *ynys* of St Piro') [10] and Scandinavian *holm* ('small, island'), as in the monastic names Durham (*dun holm*), Holme Cultram (Cumb) and Hulme St Benet's (Norfolk). Could *eg*, *ynys* and *holm*, under the influence of the early Irish missionaries, each have undergone during the Dark Ages a temporary 'semantic shift' and come to mean '(monastic) island (retreat)'? Cox notes that *eg* seems to refer to major estates, but that this sense dies out by the eighth century. The name sequence *Glastingei* (704), *Glestingaburg* (732-55) is perhaps telling.

That Celtic monks sought remote islands, headlands and marshland retreats is history. Mayr Harting, quoting Bowen, has described the remote

locations of early Welsh monasteries as '*ynys*' [11]. That the monks were the conscious inheritors of a pagan tradition is less well advertised. Ellis Davidson says 'some names (those ending in -ey for instance) indicate cult centres on islands, like that of the old Nerthus in Tacitus' account' [12]. In Ireland, St Colm when he settled an island in Lough Derg is said to have found there Maccriche, a pagan man [13]. While from Gwent, to quote a church leaflet guide (with my emphases)

'Llantilio Crossenny means the Church of St Teilo at Iddon's Cross. *Iddon was the local ruler in the sixth century who had been leading the struggle against Saxon invaders. Hearing that Teilo was at Llanarth nearby, he asked the holy man to aid him with prayers for victory. Teilo raised his cross here, on an ancient pre-Christian mound and after Iddon had defeated his enemies, this land was granted to St Teilo for the building of a church.*'

Looking at *eg* then, churches where we might seek Stenton's lost monasteries perhaps also include Rye (Sussex), Olney (Bucks), Gedney (Cambs), Witney (Oxon), Eyam (Derbs), Kersey and Eye (Suffolk). In Surrey we find Chertsey and Bermondsey (recorded seventh century monasteries), Molesey and Battersea (recorded in seventh century charters as monastic possessions), Titsey (site of a Romano-British temple), and in the Wealden forest the insignificant Puckney ('Puck's island'). (In the more minor Surrey names, however, *eg* seem to preserve the original meaning simply of 'island', as in the dialect Thames 'eyot').

After the Council of Hertford in 672, new Roman ecclesiastical organisation took over from Irish monastic influence. Minsters and their defined territories replaced the more independent Celtic monasteries [14]: is the replacement of *eg* by *burh* a reflection of this? Celtic-style monasteries either dissolved, or

mutated into the new minsters, sometimes but not always retaining their old name. A Latin term, *mynster*, came in. Thus Westminster perhaps changed its name from Thorney, as befitted a newly important state church. While in the far south-west, areas relatively lately taken into Anglo-Saxon lordships, the English names of local centres (Axminster, Exminster, Charminster, Ilminster) seem likely to have been *mynster* from the start, their prior names being Celtic.

ingas - 'people'

There must be a suspicion that *-ingas* fits into this sequence. *Ingas* ('people') is much beloved by place-name students. It is interpreted as recording the folk groupings of Germanic ('Anglo-Saxon') invaders. A different (or perhaps supplementary) interpretation is possible. Could *-ingas* place-names recall the 'followers' of early missionaries, or the 'religious communities' at monastic sites? These senses are admitted by Dodgson [15] in the case of *Guthlacingas*, the followers of Guthlac founder of Crowland Abbey in Lincolnshire at the beginning of the eighth century, and by Ekwall with *Berclingas*, 'the monks of Berkeley' in Gloucestershire. There are equivalents in *Maildubiensis aecclesia*, 'the church of the people of Maildulf for Malmesbury, and *Cuthbertfolk*, 'the people of St Cuthbert' for the sake of the Bishops of Durham [16], (Cuthbert's shrine being in the cathedral).

The Venerable Bede, writing in the 730s, is a good source of *-ingas* place-names. These need to be distinguished from his use of *-ingas* for royal lineages like *Oiscingas* 'the kings after Oisc' (i.e. of Kent). Bede's place-names, perhaps not surprisingly, occur in a religious context, like the monastery of Barking (Essex), but also as 'districts', as in *Innetlingum* (perhaps Gilling near Richmond, Yorks). This set

of lineage, religious and geographical meanings may be resolvable, in that monasteries often were the possessions of local aristocratic households [17]. That is, the household of a local *thegn* converted *en bloc* and *in situ* to the new Christianity. So, aristocratic households absorbed simultaneously the status of lineage ('*ingas*'), monastery and tribal territory (and were the instrument for the spread both of Christianity and of 'Englishness'). The territory in essence is likely to have been the catchment area of the local pre-Germanic sacred centre (the original Hundred?). This explanation is not inconsistent with, but broadens into a wider historical context, the '*ingas*' 'mini-states' postulated by Bassett and Blair [18].

Check this against the eight known *-ingas* sites of Surrey. Significantly, all occur in early charters, and in each of seven Hundreds. They are Woking (seventh century monastery; Woking Hundred), *Bintungom* (Farnham charter and Hundred; Binton Farm is by Seale, 'hall': close to later Waverley Abbey), *Eashing* (short-lived royal Saxon fort whose remote location is a puzzle but lies next to Peper Harow, possibly 'the pipers' temple', Godalming Hundred), Godalming (minster, perhaps supercedes Eashing; Godalming Hundred), Dorking (Roman station on Stane Street, and likely minster site; Wotton Hundred). Tooting (station on Stane Street; close to later Merton Abbey; Brixton Hundred), Tyting (beside the hilltop church of St Martha's; Blackheath Hundred) and Getinges (Eaton Farm at Cobham, the A3 crosses the Mole here so conceivably the lost Elmbridge, 'Mole bridge', which names this Hundred). Poulton notes that in Surrey, minster territories and Hundreds appear to be co-terminous [19].

Were the Surrey *-ingas* places all seventh century monasteries? If so, might they be connected with Birinus, the fresh emissary from the Pope who became first

bishop of Wessex (circa 635), of whom Bede recalls that he 'built and dedicated churches and brought many to the Lord', and who is said to have converted Surrey? His churches remain unidentified. One of his sponsors was king Oswald of Northumbria, which had overrun all England except Kent. Under these circumstances, and at this date (before the Council of Hertford), churches founded by the state probably would be hybrids between Roman minster territories and Celtic monastic organisation (complete with pagan undertones), and quite likely could have had a Northumbrian Anglian type of name. Thus it is interesting that *-ingas* place-names are found in Northumbria (Bede's own land), East Anglia, Middle Anglia, Essex and eastern Wessex - sub-kingdoms all newly fixed up with Celtic-trained (bar Birinus) bishops - but are absent from east Kent. (Sussex remained pagan late, but has a rash of *-ingas* places that might be associated with the activities of the Northumbrian Wilfrid, first bishop at Selsey, in 681).

If, after the Council of Hertford, Celtic-style monasteries were amalgamated into administrative minster areas, the focus is now on proto-urban, rather than archaic holy sites. In the Farnham charter (signed at some place called *Besingahearth*, 'pagan temple') we may be witnessing this process, since the dependent 'estates' (perhaps actually dependent sacred centres) apportioned to the new minster are *Cusan weoh* ('Cusa's temple'), *Bintungom* (see above) and Churt ('heath', but which conceivably is '(shrine in the) heath', as Chard in Somerset is 'house in the heath'). The charter's sponsor was Caedwalla of Wessex, a lively character who appears in both Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A 'pagan' and 'usurper' with a Celtic name, in the 680s he emerged from the forest of the Weald, devastated Wessex, the Isle of Wight, Sussex and part of Kent, before being converted by

St Wilfrid and retiring to Rome. Was his base the wild Hants/Surrey border around Farnham (Liss in Hants is Celtic *llys*, 'court / hall')? By contrast, the Chertsey documents from the settled Thames valley focus on an established monastery, with dependent *-ham* (Germanic 'home') estates which today are villages and parish churches and are perhaps the successors of Romano-British agricultural estates [20]. The Chertsey charter cites Sonning (Berks) as the neighbouring 'province' [21], perhaps, that is, the next minster territory. Blything Hundred in Suffolk is perhaps a minster territory centred on Sigeberht's monastery at Bythburgh (*burh*); Happing Hundred in Norfolk may similarly relate to Happisburgh.

Modern names in *-ing* or *-ing-* are not all *-ingas*, but if the hypothesis presented here has merit then some or all place-names containing the dative form *-inga-* ought also have religious meaning. This is conceivable for an *-inga-ham* name like Lastingham. It is more than probable for names in *-inga-hearg*, *-inga-eg*, *-inga-burh*, *-inga-hoh*, like *Gumeningaherg* (Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex), *Glastingei*, *Glestingaburg* and Ivinghoe (see *hoh*, below). And could *-inga-ham* names on the Continent originate with the missionaries who went to Europe from East Anglia? [22].

ge - 'territory'

The picture for east Kent, missing under *-ingas*, might be completed by *ge* ('territory', as in modern German *gau*). Nearly all place-names in *ge* lie here, at or close to minster sites, and fit well a concept of minster territories based on geographical zones: Eastry ('east'), Denge ('marsh'), Sturry ('on the river Stour'), Lyminge ('of the Roman town *Leimanis*'). Kentish minster territories on the Roman model could date from Kent's mid-seventh century isolation, or even from St Augustine's archbishopric at

Canterbury from 597. The only known exceptions seem to support this. Ely's monastery although in the fens traditionally was founded by St Augustine. Vange lies on the Essex bank of the Thames estuary opposite Kent. 'Surrey' ('southern *ge*') perhaps in reality is Southwark, a minster territory founded at the south gate of London by the kings of Kent?

stow - 'religious meeting place'

A late major religious place-name element, accepted as such, is *stow*, '(religious) meeting place' [23]. Examples are Stow on the Wold (Gloucs), Stow (Lincs), Stowmarket (*ecclesia de Stou*, formerly *Thorney*, Suffolk), Peterstow (earlier *Lann petyr*, Herefordshire), *sancte Albanes stow* (St Albans), but perhaps also Bristol ('*stow* at the bridge').

Surrey has two cases of *burh stow*, at Bristow Farm in Frinley by Bagshot Heath, and Burstow church a mile from Thunderfield Castle ('*Thunor's field*', see later) in the remote clayey Weald and inexplicably the site of a court of king Alfred. Do both hint backwards to lost pagan centres?

Women

A specific suggestion regarding monasteries. When a place-name has a woman's name in it, could it just be that the person referred is a member of the aristocracy who became an abbess? The most famous was Hilda of Whitby. Others might be the Bebbe who seems to appear in the name of Bamburgh (Northumberland), Tetta (abbess of Wimbourne) at Tetbury (Wilts), Wulfran at Wolverhampton, and Beage at Bibury (Glos) and Byland Abbey (Yorks) (or is this *beag*, 'circle', suggested by Barker for Beaminster in Dorset)? The essentially pagan tradition of female seers gradually dies out in English Christianity.

The Ley Hunter

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Pagan sites

Christian minsters were well established in England by the mid-eighth century, often at future town sites whose large parish churches survive to this day. But was this the end of pagan sites? Writing of Surrey, the medieval historian John Blair notes of Bisley church that it is 'conceivable that some cult survived . . . around the nearby holy well of St John the Baptist where parishioners were still being baptised within recorded memory' [24]. It is reasonable to surmise such sites to be relict pagan ones. As with the sanctification of Bisley's well through the good offices of St John, do place-names give clues to the surviving cultural significance of pagan holy springs, trees, barrows and sacred hill-tops and enclosures?.

Water

The cathedrals of Wells, Southwell and Bath relate to the springs (OE *wielle*, 'that which wells up') still found there. A Roman mausoleum has been found by the pools at Wells [25], while the miraculous hot springs at Bath were dedicated to the Celtic god Sulis. The pools at which Lichfield cathedral was sited include Stowe Pool (presumably *stow*, 'religious meeting place').

Parallels are the OE

place-name elements *aewiell*, 'source of a river', as in Ewelme (Oxon), and *wael*, 'a deep pool, whirlpool', as in the name *Medeswael* associated with Peterborough Abbey and referring to a pool in the Nene. Lincoln contains Celtic *llyn*, the 'lake' in the Witham here.

But are *most* instances of *wielle*, etc. religious (i.e. not just the obvious ones like Holywell), or do they refer to mundane water sources, as assumed? [27]. Surrey names suggest the former. *Wielle*, etc. is surprisingly uncommon: among parish names found only at Ewell (*aewiel*, a pool at the source of the Hogs Mill river in which Roman coin offerings have been found) [27], Carshalton (*aewiell*, source of the Wandle), and Camberwell - all in north-east Surrey, an area later known for its medicinal spas.

Consider also the rare Latin survival *fūnta* ('fountain, spring'), Welsh *ffynnon*, and OE *burna* ('spring, stream'). One set of names, Bidwell (Beds), and the adjacent Bedfont and Stanwell (Middlesex), containing *byden* ('trough') [28] and *stan* ('stone'), seem likely to relate to the stone basins commonly found at holy wells. *Burna* in Surrey and elsewhere came to mean 'bourne, stream', but when used as a place- rather than a river-name the sense 'spring' seems evident. The minster name Sherborne (Dorset, 'bright spring') has its Surrey counterpart in Shirburn Spring, the former name of the Silent Pool near Guildford. This deep, clear legend-girt pool at the foot of the Downs closely resembles that at Wanborough (also near Guildford) where a Romano-British temple has been found; the name Shirburn appears to have transferred to the sub-minster at the village of Shere a mile from the Silent Pool.

Trees, stones, crosses

Sacred trees do not seem so well evidenced in place-names. Perhaps their significance faded

earlier. Notable, however, are the overt religious connotations of a small minority of names with the OE element *leah*, a term whose origins are obscure but which seems normally to mean something like 'wood'. Just a few catch the eye. Willey / Weoley, (Surrey, Worcs) means '*leah* with a heathen temple'. A sense 'holy grove' for such cases seems likely, especially when one adds the other Surrey names Thursley and Tuesley apparently referring to the worship of Thunor and Tiw. Another example is Thunder(s)ley in Essex [29].

Of similar type may be names in *graf* ('grove'), as in Gravesend (Kent, Northants), Grafton (various counties), Bromsgrove (a minster, Worcs). Near Wing (Bucks), an -ingas place with a surviving early minster, Wingrave perhaps marks a prior holy site.

Treo ('tree') is found in some important names, including Oswestry, Daventry, Coventry, and interestingly as Ekwall notes, in 'several Hundred-names'. That 'tree' may be sometimes a term for a (wooden) religious upright or cross, is indicated by *Croesoswald*, the Welsh name for Oswestry. That Hundreds often did centre on natural trees, is shown by a name like Copthorne Hundred in Surrey, 'at the pollarded hawthorn'. Some meeting places may have been marked by a (standing) stone or stone cross rather than a tree, as perhaps at Boston ('Botolph's stone', Lincs), Holystone Abbey (Yorks), and the Surrey Hundred-name Brixton ('Beorhtsige's stone').

Barrows

The term *beorg*, 'barrow', is normally considered descriptive of a mere landscape feature. Continuing cultural significance is obvious where the name retains that of the individual whose burial mound it is. This happens with the term *hlaw*, 'barrow', as in Wilmslow ('Wilhelm's hlaw') and Taplow (Taepa's, Bucks - see Eric Fitch

in *At the Edge* No.1). *Hlaw* seems used of new feudal Germanic burial mounds like Taeppa's of circa 620 (where the rediscovered adjacent church of 700 could be the *burh* of Berry Hill). That prehistoric mounds retained a role in the community is suggested by the survival of the Celtic-derived element *cruc* (Welsh *crug*), as in Crich (Derbs), Crick (Northants), Cricklade (Wilts), Crewkerne (Somerset; interestingly, 'cruc house', i.e. monastery?) and the Somerset and Surrey names Creechbarrow / Crooksbury (cruc beorg). (That *crug* in Wales meant barrow seems proven by the coincidence of *crug* names with tumuli evident for example on O.S. map 145 of the Preseli mountains of north Pembrokeshire).

In Surrey, *cruc* crops up at the aforementioned Crooksbury Hill (beside the -ingas place Bintungom), Creek Copse (by Hascombe hillfort), and *Cherchefelle* Hundred (likely centred at one time on Thunderfield Castle, see below).

Sacred hill-tops

Beowulf's burial mound was sited on a hill-top. In such cases the OE element *hoh* seems to present itself. It is said to mean a 'projecting ridge of land', deriving from the word 'heel'. Yet clearly some *hoh* sites are of special significance. Synods were held in 645 at *Icanho* and in 747 at *Clofesho*. These locations are not known, but it has been suggested that *Clofesho* may be the eighth century minster at Brixworth in Northants [30]; this church stands beside a mound. *Icanho* might be Iken, a flattish hill beside the Alde estuary in Suffolk, where recently the remains of a Saxon cross have been found at the church [31]. No less suggestive are hill-top names like Ivinghoe Beacon on the Chilterns, Trentishoe ('circle *hoh*') on the Devon cliffs, the seventh century monastery of Hoo on a hill

above the Medway estuary, and the famous ship burial tumuli at Sutton Hoo above the Deben estuary in Suffolk. Is *hoh* a religious term, or are *hoh*-named sites simply good places to investigate? What, for example, is at Plymouth Hoe?

Houghton and Hutton (*hoh tun*) appear in several counties, perhaps not always at religious sites. In Surrey, *hoh* (as Hoe, etc.) seems partially to correlate with parishes containing ingas names. Were our postulated seventh century minsters cited adjacent to pre-existing religious centres, the focus Surrey's original Hundreds?

Sacred enclosures

Old English names for stone circles and the like seem rarely to have survived. Exceptions may be Stonehenge ('hanging stones'), Ringstead ('place of the ring', Norfolk, Northants), Trentishoe (*trendels hoh*, see above) and Bewholme (*beagum*, 'at the rings', Yorks).

But look at OE *ora*, said to mean 'border, margin, bank'. Again this clearly is a culturally significant term. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle claims *Cymenesora* and *Cerdicsora* respectively to be the landing places of the Germanic conquerors of Sussex and Wessex. Since the latter name seems to contain a Celtic personal name [32], are we dealing rather with British coastal religious centres at which the invaders first seized ratification?

Does *ora* in fact describe the embankments at significant sites - for example those surrounding Bronze Age sacred hill-top sites? At Oare (Wilts) is a huge such enclosure, and the same name in Berks and Kent (as in Wilts), figure in charters. As to the continuing importance of Bronze Age hill-top enclosures, Cunliffe notes of Sussex that all three known rural Romano-British temples occur inside such [33].

In Surrey, *ora* is recorded in eight places, usually hill-tops and including Nore below Creek Copse (see above), a lost 'wolf

ora' beside Thursley (see above), and Nore Hill in Chelsham where a prehistoric embankment has recently been discovered [35]. Surrey's most obvious sacred hills are not named with *ora*; instead, the Hills of St Martha, St Catherine (formerly Drakehull, 'dragon hill') and St Ann are topped by chapels which overshadow any former embankments.

Rituals

Just occasionally, a place-name may give a clue to the activities at religious sites. What, for example, were 'pipers' up to at Peper Harow temple in Surrey?

We note from Ekwall Mottisfont ('pleader's *junta*', Hants), Botwell ('healing spring', Middlesex), Fritwell ('well for auguries', Oxon), Elwell ('wishing well', Dorset). Such essentially religious rituals have their counterpart in the civil activities Ekwall suggests at for example Thingoe Hundred ('assembly mound', Suffolk), and Playstow names (marking places for sporting games, or maybe for religious plays).

Wanborough in Wilts, Ekwall notes '. . . looks like . . . "wagon", but it is not easy to see what a compound waegenbeorg could mean. Cf., however, Wagenberg . . . in Germany'. Do we here have a reference to pagan ceremony involving the progression to the barrow of a holy wagon (see Alby Stone's article in *At the Edge* No.2)?

Beside Nore Hill in Surrey is Worms Heath, 'snake's head' - one of a type with Heronshead ('eagle's head') and Evershead ('boar's head') also in the county. In discussing such names, and others including Gateshead ('goat's-', Durham) and Manshead Hundred ('man's-', Bedfordshire), Dickson [34] cites the pagan Germanic habit of religious decapitation, but Green [35] notes equivalent rituals among the Celts.

A place-name theory

We need to put religious place-names in context. Early estates, according to Ford [36], centred on a particular focus and a particular name; most other names were generated as geographical and economic dependents. Perhaps we can now say that the core 'estate' name often was religious. (The 'estate' anyway being a series of Chinese boxes: sometimes a hall, sometimes the Hundred, sometimes the pagan centre, monastery or minster, later the manor or parish). Thus the fact that Chertsey Abbey's charter lists a set of *-ham* estates says nothing about their date or origins, but more about the power of the Church to codify a system. As Sawyer says [37], Old English place-names probably were subject to periodic complete substitution, with stability achieved only through the influence of legal or tax documents, or by the construction of a church.

We have noted a progression in monastic names, from *-eg* through *-burh* to *-mynster*, and suggested this reflects religious power politics. A general view of the way place-names change is needed. Sometimes core names are replaced, but perhaps as often they simply are modified or translated, as in the series *Glastingei*, *Glestingaburg* perhaps from Celtic *glasto*, 'wood', where the earlier Celtic name *Ineswytrin* (Latin/Welsh *Ynys Vitrium*) may likewise have meant 'island of wood'. Sometimes an earlier name survives attached to a marginally different geographical site, as in Surrey probably at Peper Harow / Eashing, and at *Cherchefelle* / Thunderfield / Burstow. The 'different sites' may well be a church, and the pagan spring, barrow or enclosure it replaced.

Religion provided cultural continuity. It was doubtless their religious content that allowed the Romano-British terms *cruc* and *funta* to survive. John [38] has suggested Celtic place-names survive where a local Romano-

British aristocracy survived late. Perhaps this 'aristocracy' sometimes was monastic or priestly. The cathedral name Lichfield retained the bones of the name of the Roman town of *Leto cetum* (Wall, Staffs) [40] when the local administrative focus shifted (reverted?) to priests at a sacred pool two miles away.

So, place-names relate to religious sites in different ways. An archaic name may not be inherently religious but, as in the case of Lichfield, may survive through ecclesiastical agency. Or, a place-name element may have gathered a (temporary?) religious meaning over time: examples being Welsh *llan* (originally 'enclosure', later 'religious enclosure'), and perhaps the OE *eg*, *ge*, *-ingas*, *burh* (interpretations easy to miss if you have no adequate religious paradigm to call on).

Few place-name elements define objects that are specifically religious: *weoh*, *hearg* (both 'pagan temple'), *mynster*, *cirice* (both 'church'), but probably also *cruc*, *beorg*, *hlaw*. Some objects may appear secular or topographical but perhaps most commonly can more accurately be seen as religious: those indicated by *funta*, *wielle*, *hoh*, *ora*.

So it seems our place-names are permeated by religious references of one sort or another. For the reason, one could look to Higham. He sees post-Roman England as a largely constant population with a smattering of intrusive energetic 'Anglo-Saxons' and a gradually acculturating British nobility becoming 'English'. Newly enthused and peripatetic Christian missionaries doubtless were a civilising influence by personal example, but in the end, 'local group loyalties may have been more to cult centres than to specific dynasties.' [39]

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1: Unless otherwise stated, all OE forms and interpretations are taken from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English*

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Bede's *Hrypsaetna cirican*, 'the church of the people of the Hrype tribe', for Ripon.

Analysis of the first elements of *-ingas*, *-inga-* names is relevant. Some personal names repeat themselves - are they peripatetic ecclesiastics? Like Teilo who became Bishop of Llandaff, it may even be possible to track missing persons through the ecclesiastical record. Could Bass or Basa at Basing (Hants, and in Bucks by a monastery near Runnymede) and/or Baschurch (Shrops), be the *thegn* Bass who retreated with the papal missionary Paulinus south from York in the 630's, and/or the 'priest Bass' given in 669 the Roman fort at Reculver in Kent for a monastery? (Bede; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation*, D. Whitelock et al (eds), Eyre and Spottiswode 1961).

Some *-ingas* and *-inga-* names seem to contain totemic words (my thanks to Alby Stone for this suggestion): the *helm* ('helmet') and *scyld* ('shield') of the Helmingas and Scyldingas lineages of Scandinavia, and in English place-names the *bill* ('sword, point of land') of Billing-, the *gara* ('spear, strip of land') of Goring and the *horn* ('horn, point of land') of Horning-. In antique lineage names, totems or warrior nicknames might be expected. In place-names, the explanation could equally reflect some religious practice, or be topographical (as also perhaps in the 'up' of Upping- / Epping), eg. 'monastery or people on the point / strip of land' - reminiscent of Twynham, former name of Christchurch Priory in Hants, '(monastery) between the rivers'. Place is important in ancient religious sites, and we are perhaps dealing in geomancy (see discussion of *hoh*, later).

A British tribal area in the 'Avon' valley might be reflected in Avening (Gloucs), paralleling Axminster (Devon) and Sturry (Kent) in the Axe and Stour valleys (see discussion of *ge*).

Cf. Bede's Meanwara, 'people of the Meon valley', and the minster at Meon (Hants).

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PAGANISM

in British folk customs

Given the extent to which modern-day pagans take as a truism that many of our folk customs have, unconsciously, retained relics of their heathen origins is traceable to the success of one man's major opus - Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a multi-volume work published in the 1890s.

'It is difficult to overrate the influence of *The Golden Bough*. It offered a pattern which was immediately and attractively available; and it proceeded to dominate attitudes and thinking to a remarkable extent. The vegetation drama, ritual death and resurrection, the sacred tree, became accepted elements . . .' So observed Roy Judge in his study of the Jack-in-the-Green [1], also noting that the Frazerian influence was complex.

While modern day researchers find little of Frazer's work holds up to scrutiny, his opinions were accepted almost without question for about 60 years. In the introduction to the abridged one volume edition of *The Golden Bough*, prepared some thirty years after the original research [2], Frazer wrote: 'I have neither added new material nor altered the views expressed in the last edition; for the evidence which has come to my knowledge in the meantime has on the whole served either to confirm my former conclusions or to furnish fresh illustrations of old principles.'

Frazer's objectives were straightforward: to demonstrate that Christianity derived from the same principles as so-called

'Is some riddle solved by my surviving forever?
Is not eternal life itself as much of a riddle as our present life?'

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* 1922

'primitive' religions. Within the constraints of the then-active blasphemy laws Frazer strove to treat the Bible as another rich mythology - to be studied objectively, and with the same contempt for the beliefs as academics showed for non-Christian faiths.

'A group of men with
bells on their legs,
dancing frenetically'

Frazer's views were based on the work of Sir Lawrence Gomme, Sir Edward Tylor and Wilhelm Mannhardt although Frazer proved to be the better known of these researchers. Frazer in his turn influenced Sir Edmund Chambers and Cecil Sharp. Sharp, almost single-handedly, inspired the English folk dance revival and, in the process, drew attention to the then-dying remnants of other folk customs. Sharp's Frazerian-influenced opinions were contested at the time but between 1914 and the early 1970s his views were unopposed - folklorists 'were not concerned with evidence (or the lack of it) of historical continuity, and . . . relied entirely upon similarities and parallels in form to construct grand hypotheses.' [3]

Part of these 'grand hypotheses' was that morris dancing was an ancient rite which had remained unaltered for centuries. When an historian, Barbara Lowe, published her studies of the earliest origins of morris dancing in 1957 [4] she was totally ignored. This is not in the least surprising, as what she discovered runs entirely counter to Sharp's fantasy. Lowe found that morris dances first appeared about 1450 as a new craze in the courts of the nobility and royalty throughout western Europe. These courts were notoriously fashion-conscious and briefly-favoured novelty was as prevalent then as in our own times.

Courtly morris of the fifteenth century was a Christmas-tide entertainment involving a group of men with bells on their legs, dancing frenetically in an attempt to woo a lady. After this display of male vitality she, in fine fickle, gave her heart to a fool. Not only did this little scenario find favour in the palaces of England, soon it was spreading among the common people. First along the Thames to nearby towns and then, by the sixteenth century, throughout England. Along the way it became less a feature of Christmas than of the Maytime or summer games.



A medieval mummer's play with the characters dressed in animal masks.

A few 'traditions' really are traditional

The history of morris dancing is similar to many other popular traditions. A number of historians have intensively studied specific aspects of 'traditional' customs - and repeatedly revealed that these traditions peter out before the eighteenth century. A few 'traditions' really are traditional - but there are few of them. When we decorate our homes with greenery and give each other presents at Christmas, we are following a custom which goes back 'time out of mind'. Few of us light bonfires for Mayday or Midsummer but, up until the late nineteenth century, this was a common-place custom which, also, can be traced back beyond written records. Probably the erection of Maypoles is equally archaic. But written records ominously peter out for all other 'traditional' customs.

Historians know well that events are best shown up in written sources when they contravene custom or legislation. The names of common people most frequently enter the annals of written history when they appear in court records for greater or

lesser crimes; not infrequently, drunkenness on feast days. The once-heated debates of churchwardens and clergy are veiled beneath the dry records of parish registers. These same registers reveal year after year the amounts spent preparing for such festivities as 'church ales' - until, abruptly, these expenses are no longer part of the meticulous lists. No one at the time explicitly stated that church ales had been superseded by other (less bawdy) forms of fund-raising, but the evidence is clear enough. So the genealogy of popular customs can be pieced together.

'How traditional was "traditional"?'

There is clear evidence that in the late medieval era 'new devotional fads were enthusiastically explored by a laity eager for religious variety' [5] The greatest of the feasts of the late medieval liturgy, Corpus Christi, apparently well-established since time immemorial, was comparatively new, dating only from the thirteenth century.

Such were the religious practices of the populace. This was 'traditional religion' in Britain - although this simply

begs the question, 'How traditional was "traditional"?' Running in parallel were the ascending aristocratic interests in astrology and the attempts to subdue 'witchcraft' and the various activities of 'cunning' men and women. The boundaries between religion and magic were less well-drawn than they are with the hindsight of modern mentalities [6].

Behind these terse paragraphs are entire academic careers picking over the ways in which social history is a patchwork of ever-evolving changes. We think of our own times as being subject to unique processes of change. Yet history records an ever-changing flow. The difference of the modern day is mostly that the processes of communication are more immediate and more detailed, giving a greater awareness of change. An additional and pertinent difference is that, until recently, the 'meanings' of popular customs were not fixed by written accounts. *Why* things were done was the least rooted aspect of these activities.

'Customs quite out of fashion'

Peeling the layers of the onion away, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the pro-Reformation and counter-Reformation sway back and forth with greater or lesser enthusiasm and enforcement. The reign of Elizabeth I provided an era of comparative tolerance, where the country was officially Protestant but the zeal of the senior clergy could be, and was, vetoed by the monarch.

During the Civil War and Restoration there is widespread written evidence of the way new religious and social ideals were being promulgated. The sometimes brutally aggressive Puritans stripped the churches of their images, rood lofts and altars - while a smaller, less-aggressive number, from time to time attempted to restore some of the 'popish' traditions [7].

Just how thoroughly the Reformation and Civil War swept away traditional customs is revealed by writers of the time. John Aubrey is a name well-known for his early antiquarian interests. He was a child before the Civil War and could see first-hand how many local customs, such as midsummer bonfires, had vanished during the Interregnum, 'the civil wars coming on have put all these rites or customs quite out of fashion.' [8] Aubrey also tells how the once-annual custom of decorating the salt-well at Droitwich on the patron saint's festival was prohibited; the well promptly dried up. The ceremony was restored the following year, whereupon the water once again flowed.

Much has been made of the Restoration of Charles II and the establishment of Royal Oak or Oak Apple Day (29th May) as a 'surrogate' for the Mayday festivities prohibited by the Puritans. Yet closer inspection reveals that over thirty years of Puritan campaigning had wrought a severe dislocation and the popular pastimes which were 'restored' were different in nature and character. In essence, the post-Restoration festivities were not so much spontaneous customs of the common people as events which were organised by the 'gentry'. It was the subtle transition from 'participating' to 'attending'. [9]

Gentrification

The modern era is much better documented regarding folk customs. Superficially, this might be thought that our society became more self-conscious of the need to preserve itself in writing. But this is somewhat inaccurate. Plenty of records exist in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but the popular customs were so commonplace that they were rarely considered worthy of mention, except when unusual rowdiness or other irregularities entered the annals. Only in the late

eighteenth century did educated observers become sufficiently separated from the common people that they began to record popular customs, rather in the manner that early explorers were systematically documenting foreign cultures [10].

By the late nineteenth century the fairly copious written records reveal that popular customs were again undergoing wide-spread changes. Victorian moral standards disfavoured drunkenness, brawling and any suggestions of lewdness. And, as court records reveal, the former two were inextricably linked to village festivities, and the latter is frequently alleged by detractors (although parish records of births do not provide evidence for a surfeit of milk-maids defloriated at Maytide). There is more than a little to suggest that such holidays were traditionally a time for local lads to visit a neighbouring village, not just for a few beers, but an inevitable punch-up with the 'home team' [11].

One might be forgiven for thinking that the South Lindsey district of Lincolnshire is as traditional and slow-to-change as any part of England. But, as Obelkevich found [12], this area was always in contact with the groundswell of change. His meticulous study of rural society there in the mid-nineteenth century reveals the same processes of 'gentrification' which other researchers, such as Bushaway [13], reveal for elsewhere in the country.

Bushaway draws upon many first-hand accounts. One of these, written in the 1880s, describes the Mayday activities in a Hampshire village. Bushaway discerns 'the ceremonies of Mayday were deliberately transformed to accord more with prevailing Victorian taste and ideas of social behaviour. The Ruskinian image of little schoolchildren or young girls carrying delicate May garlands under the kindly supervision of an adult was a popular one, well known in Victorian art. The image bore little relationship to the earlier more robust customs

which had been consistently suppressed and discouraged . . .'

Bushaway discusses in detail the demise of bull baiting, street football, cheese rolling, 'Whipping Toms', and a number of other 'boisterous' popular pastimes. All these were more-or-less totally eradicated throughout the country by the combined efforts of the local justices, clergy and other gentry.

Despite the best efforts of the Victorian patriarchs a handful of these customs did survive. But they did not escape unchanged. Some, like the Abbots Bromley Horn Dancers, benefited from natty costumes (previously the performers wore their everyday clothes). Ironically, at the very end of the Victorian era it was the ideas of Frazer which were imposed on the traditions. The process of 'paganisation' had begun.

The same imposition of Victorian and Edwardian values can be recognised in the way folk music was being recorded. Cecil Sharp and other pioneers must have spent untold hours 'in the field' transcribing songs by ear. They cannot but have known that traditional folk singers vary their melodies slightly from verse to verse and use subtle rhythmic and pitch embellishments. Yet their transcriptions show an 'idealised' version, tidied up to fit into the twelve-note scale and simple rhythmic schemes. Great play was made of the 'modality' of the melodies, as if this in some way made them exotic. When 'serious' composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams or Percy Grainger got hold of these tunes the process was intensified, with four-square harmonies being imposed in place of the entirely different idiom of monophonic music. If it is hard to imagine the original singers' voices while listening to Vaughan Williams' symphonic settings of folk songs, so we should be equally suspicious of how much the written record of folk customs has been equally bowdlerised.



The earliest-known illustration of dancing around a maypole in England, from 1680s.

'Christianity was often paganised'

This is not to suggest that Frazer was to blame. Paganism was an integral part of nineteenth century European culture. Not, I stress, in a sense that in any way suggested worship or even belief in pre-Christian deities. The Renaissance had re-awakened awareness of Classical paganism, and the Classics remained the bedrock of educated European culture - the foundations from which all other civilisations had evolved. In the less-educated popular minds some of this spilled over but a complex syncretism of magic and respect for the Christian concept of the Devil provided a system of superstitions which, for want of a better term, is usually described as 'pagan'.

However, as Obelkevich emphasises, 'To use the term "paganism" for the non-Christian elements in popular religion [of the mid-nineteenth century] is convenient but misleading, since like popular religion as a whole, it was not a distinct and conscious movement or

organisation but a loose agglomeration of religious phenomena. It was not a counter-religion to Christianity; rather, the two coexisted and complemented each other.' [14]

Nevertheless, at the end of his study, Obelkevich writes, 'It is hard to avoid the conclusion that paganism was dominant and Christianity recessive in popular religion. Paganism was rarely christianized, but Christianity was often paganized.' Those who want to understand the context of these conclusions should read his book - hiding behind the scope of a regional study are many ideas of wider importance.

The paganised survivors

The imaginations of the late Victorian folklorists were fuelled by this on-going popular 'paganism' within Christianity and the notions of a unified pre-Christian pagan past seemingly supported by Frazer's melting-down of ethnology.

These imaginations asserted that hobby horses - such as that at Padstow - must be survivors of the masked dancers which early Christians, such as Theodore in

his oft-quoted homily, attempted to suppress [15]. Likewise, foliate heads - so frequently found carved in the stonework of churches - were, to the eyes of Lady Raglan (who coined the term 'Green Man' to describe them), evidence of a subversive veneration of vegetation gods [16].

Yet, despite bending over backwards to incorporate all evidence for an early origin for ritual animal disguises, E.C. Cawte is forced to conclude that, while there are records of hobby-horses throughout most of the sixteenth century, these were intended to represent a horse and rider in a pageant. 'It is only toward the end of that period that there are records of a single hobby-horse with a morris team.' [17]

Hooded animals (of the Padstow type) enter written records about 1800; 'There is evidence neither for a hooded animal much before that date, nor for an association between hooded animal and the morris dance, nor that this type of construction was ever called a hobby-horse before [the twentieth] century' concludes Cawte. He acknowledges that 'there are records of animal disguise in every century since the thirteenth, in either Great Britain or France. The recent customs might therefore be expected to have lengthy pedigrees, but they seem to be distinct from the events recorded earlier that the situation is much as before; it can only be guessed that there may be some connection between recent customs and the older ones.' Despite such bending-over-double to admit the possibility of guesswork, the conclusion is clear - there is no evidence.

Jack-in-the-Green figures - ones covered from top to toe in greenery - have some slight affinity to Padstow-type horses. Their history has been covered equally thoroughly by Roy Judge [18]. His detailed study reveals that their origins are in the Mayday revelries of sweeps - which were mostly concerned

with antics intended to 'dance the unwary out of halfpence' [19]. As sweeps were not needed until the early eighteenth century (as a result of the increased use of coal and the more complex construction of chimneys) there is no reason to suppose that the Jack-in-the-Green dates back any earlier. After much discussion of the evidence and possible antecedents, such as the 'Garland dances' of milkmaids, Judge determines 'there is no evidence for any earlier history or other interpretation.'

If Jack-in-the-Greens are an eighteenth century entertainment, then the medieval foliate faces could still be pagan. But, as the pioneering study of Romanesque carvings by Anthony Weir and James Jarman revealed, the early development of the foliate face is complex and perhaps part of a family of motifs originally intended to depict the Seven Deadly Sins - with the Green Man representing Lust [20]. These suggestions were innovative yet, ten years after publication, have not been seriously contested.

Did the apparently pagan customs of animal disguises and Green Men have a pagan origin? The evidence provided by these thorough researchers clearly demonstrates that the supposition of pagan origins does not fit the evidence.

Modern pagan beliefs

During the 1970s and 80s the whole edifice built up on Frazer's foundations was steadily dismantled by academics. Nothing of consequence was left. Folklore studies adopted a more functionalist approach (some would argue an excessively functionalist approach!) and turned their backs on pan-cultural synthesis.

At the same time modern-day witchcraft was gathering momentum. Much of this energy was provided initially by Gerald Gardner, whose eclecticism makes the term syncretism an

understatement. Drawing on the ideas of, among others, Margaret Murray (*The Witch-cult in Western Europe*) and Robert Graves (*The White Goddess*), with more than a little input from the ceremonial magic of the Golden Dawn and its descendants, he invented pagan 'wiccan' rituals. To give credence to these he overplayed his contact with some traditional 'cunning' men and women in Hampshire, suggesting that they were part of some organised tradition dating back to the mists of time [21].

Just when academe was shaking off the dodgy meta-theories of Frazer, and consigning *The Witch-cult in Western Europe* to the pile of books based on deliberately-distorted evidence (*The White Goddess* had never been taken seriously by anyone else; even the author regretted publishing it!), these very ideas were being taken up by the exponents of popular paganism and thereby gained an even wider influence which continues little-abated to this day.

Part of the reason is that, all too often, academic specialists live in a different belief system to the outside world (even other academics in different disciplines). Everybody except paleolithic experts thinks cave paintings were about hunting magic. Everybody except neolithic experts think the New Stone Age peoples venerated a Great Mother Goddess. Everybody except specialists in the period think the victims of the witch-hunts were practitioners of a pre-Christian pagan religion. Almost everybody thinks sheela-na-gigs were pagan deities. Fortunately someone was thoughtful enough to provide non-specialists with an update on what could be known with some certainty, ruthlessly exposing anything that was only supposition. That person was Ronald Hutton, who came to academic and popular attention with his book *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* [22]. Since then

other authors have attempted to unravel facts from popular pagan fictions; for instance Miranda Green [23] discusses Celtic triple deities, keeping a great distance from Graves' fabrication of a three-fold goddess.

Predictably, those who espouse modern pagan beliefs have attacked Hutton, leading to some vituperative correspondence [24]. But as he was mostly the bearer of the news that many different researchers had independently concluded there is no factual basis to their faith (but since when has that ever been a problem to religions?) this might be regarded as misdirected - all the more so because Hutton is actively involved in modern paganism.

Regrettably these debates between modern pagans and those they perceive as 'Huttonites', entertaining and revealing as they may be, have served as something as a smoke screen which has distracted attention away from the key issues. My hope is that this article will not regenerate the smoke, but will encourage readers to explore for themselves the research which Hutton summarised. The overall impact of that research puts folklore and related affairs into a different perspective from the popularly-held viewpoint. No one is disputing that morris dancing, Green Men and the like have, over the last few decades, become paganised. Rather, this is just one more veneer on the ever-changing nature of these 'traditions'. But these modern pagan ideas are quite distinct from historical understanding.

The key word here is 'historical'. The work summarised by Hutton is that of historians, where absence of written evidence is taken as *prima facie* evidence of absence. Folklore and folk custom, by their nature, are manifestations of primarily oral cultures. Such oral traditions all-too-quickly fade into silence. Frazer gave voice to that silence in a manner

which retained few, if any, echoes of the original. The chorus of Frazerians reverberates on, at least outside academe. Recent academic studies have, so far, been by historians rather than anthropologists who might be more sensitive to picking up 'inaudible' oral traditions. The work summarised in this article is, perhaps, only a starting point.

Postscript

At the time of researching and writing this article I was not aware of exactly what David Clarke and Andy Roberts were quietly cooking up. The publication of their *Twilight of the Celtic Gods* (see reviews section of this issue) proves that they have got well past the starting point in picking up hitherto-unheard oral traditions. I have chosen not to modify the text of this article in the light of reading their book, although clearly a number of issues are illuminated in new ways by their 'informants' from the traditional village families of the Peak District and south Yorkshire.

Ronald Hutton's latest book, *The Stations of the Sun*, also arrived after this article was written (again see reviews section). His book deals, in greater depth, with most of the topics outlined here. I have not modified my text (although the two illustrations used here are taken from *The Stations of the Sun*) but simply recommend this work as essential reading for anyone who wants to find out more about British folk customs.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Professor Ronald Hutton for drawing my attention to key sources and providing background information to his published works. He kindly read an earlier draft and amended comments relating to Frazer. However, the views expressed here do not necessarily reflect his opinions.

Two books which lurk in the background of this research, but

which do not receive overt citation, are Aron Gurevich's *Medieval Popular Culture - problems of belief and perception* (trans. J.M. Bak, Cambridge UP, 1988) and Charles Phythian-Adams' brief but inspirational (and unjustly overlooked) *Local History and Folklore - a new framework* (Bedford Square Press, 1975).

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- 1: Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green - a May Day custom*, D.S. Brewer, 1979.
- 2: James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edn 1922; frequently reprinted.
- 3: Bob Bushaway, *By Rite - custom, ceremony and community in England 1700-1880* Junction Books, 1982.
- 4: Barbara Lowe, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1957; cited in Ronald Hutton, 'Morris and Marian', *Talking Stick* No.16 Oct 1994 p13-15. Hutton's article is the source of all these remarks regarding the the origins of Morris dancing and contains several other references to sources not cited here. One key source is: John Forrest and Michael Heaney, 'Charting early morris', *Folk Music Journal*, vi (1990-2) p169-86.
- 5: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars - traditional religion in England c.1400 - c.1580*, Yale UP, 1992.
- 6: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic - studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971; Penguin edition 1991. Despite its date, the formidable scope of this book remains valid as a major source of insight into popular belief.
- 7: Duffy, op. cit.; David Cressy *Bonfires and Bells - national memory and the Protestant calendar in Elizabethan Stuart England*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989; David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion - popular politics and culture in England 1603-1660*, Clarendon, 1985.
- 8: John Aubrey, *Remaines*, cited in Underdown, op. cit.
- 9: Bushaway, op. cit.; Cressy, op. cit.; Ronald Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the evidence of folklore', *Past and present* No.148 Aug 1995; R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England - the ritual year 1400-1700* Oxford UP 1995; R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, Oxford UP 1996.
- 10: Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the evidence of folklore' op. cit.
- 11: This ritualised male aggression, clearly visible in traditional Shrove Tuesday street football and the Easter Monday Hallaton Bottle Kicking, also survived until recently on the terraces of football stadia (and is one of the UKs few exports to Europe). It is not simply a 'territorial instinct', as ritual fisticuffs were a feature of Irish funeral customs until very recently (see Gearoid O Cruaiaich, 'Contest in the cosmology and the ritual of the Irish "Merry Wake"', *Cosmos* No.6, 1990 p145-160). While it may date me, I think also of the Bank Holiday activities at certain seaside resorts during the 1960s, when gangs of scooter-riding 'Mods' arrived. In its various manifestations, this ritual aggression is an aspect of 'liminality' in its own right, and deserves more detailed discussion.
- 12: James Obelkevich, *Religion and rural society - South Lindsey 1825-1875*, Clarendon, 1976.
- 13: Bushaway, op. cit.
- 14: Obelkevich, op. cit.
- 15: 'Theodore's famous homily against those who disguise themselves as animals on the Kalends of January has been attributed to Theodore of Tarus, Archbishop of Canterbury, but this attribution is an error and the homily is not English.' E.K. Chambers *The Medieval Stage* (Vol.II, p305), Clarendon, 1903, cited in E.C. Cawte, *Ritual Animal Disguise*, D.S. Brewer, 1978.
- 16: Lady Raglan, 'The Green Man in church architecture', *Folklore* Vol.50 1939. (This

article is the original source of the term 'Green Man' for foliate heads.)

17: Cawte, op. cit.

18: Judge, op. cit.

19: Punch, 1844, IV, p196 cited in Judge op. cit.

20: Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust - sexual carvings on medieval churches*, Batsford 1986.

21: While individual, often idiosyncratic, folk charms and remedies of the cunning ones may have been passed down by word of mouth for many generations, there is no suggestion of any organisation or common approach. Academic literature sometimes makes poor distinctions between superstition, magic 'charms' and so-called 'witchcraft'; notable exceptions are Thomas (op. cit) and Obelkevich (op. cit.). Thomas and Obelkevich both identify widespread witchcraft (Obelkevich specifically stating

that it was flourishing in South Lindsey in the nineteenth century) but what they describe is clearly not an organised religion (still less with any affinities to Gardnerian-influenced paganism) but rather the rag-tag remnants of folk magic that were to further degrade into the private superstitions of today (such as touching wood for 'luck').

One of the leading figures in the modern pagan movement, Michael Howard, has published a number of articles in his magazine, *The Cauldron*, which deal with the roots of wicca around the middle of this century. His research has been thorough and involved interviewing many of the key people (several of whom are now dead). Despite this thoroughness he has found no indications of connections with a 'living tradition' of organised witchcraft predating Gardner.

I interpret this as fairly conclusive evidence that there was no such 'living tradition' (outside the mind of Gardner and his followers) although acknowledging that Howard would disagree with my opinions.

The information revealed by David Clarke and Andy Roberts in *Twilight of the Celtic Gods* (Blandford 1996; review in this issue) provides considerable support for the first two paragraphs of this footnote (which, as with the remainder of this article, were written before publication of their book).

22: Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, Basil Blackwell, 1991.

23: Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, British Museum, 1995.

24: See, for instance, the letters section of *The Ley Hunter* No.124, 1996, p29-33.

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The third article to appear in
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I have it on the impeccable authority of two retired schoolmasters that our Anglo-Saxon ancestors used to worship strange gods called Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. See *1066 And All That* if inclined to disbelief. Messrs. Seller & Yeatman didn't have much to say about the ancient Celts, but that gap in their original publication has since been supplied by many other works of almost equal merit. Take Herne the Hunter, for instance, who is a version of the pagan Celtic god Cernunnos. No doubt about it. I saw a picture of him - rather a good one - in that standard work, the *I-Spy Book of Ghosts and Hauntings*.

Yielding to a certain low-minded scepticism, we may feel the need for some original texts rather than Big Chief I-Spy's version of them. In the case of Herne, this leads us into the plot of one of Shakespeare's minor comedies, the scene in Act IV of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* where Mistress Page tells her friends:

Herne the Hunter - A Case of Mistaken Identity?

'There is an old tale goes, that
Herne the Hunter
Sometime a keeper here in
Windsor forest,
Doth all the winter-time, at still
midnight
Walk round about an oak, with
great ragg'd horns'.
This sounds scary and, yes, he is
a malevolent spectre who -
'blasts the tree, and takes the
cattle,
And makes the milch-kine yield
blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful
manner' (1).

However, there is no need to worry, because Herne doesn't exist. Mistress Page puts down all the tales about him to the inventiveness of 'the superstitious idle-headed eld'.

Above: Herne fleeing past the
oak with Mabel Lyndwood.
By Cruickshank.

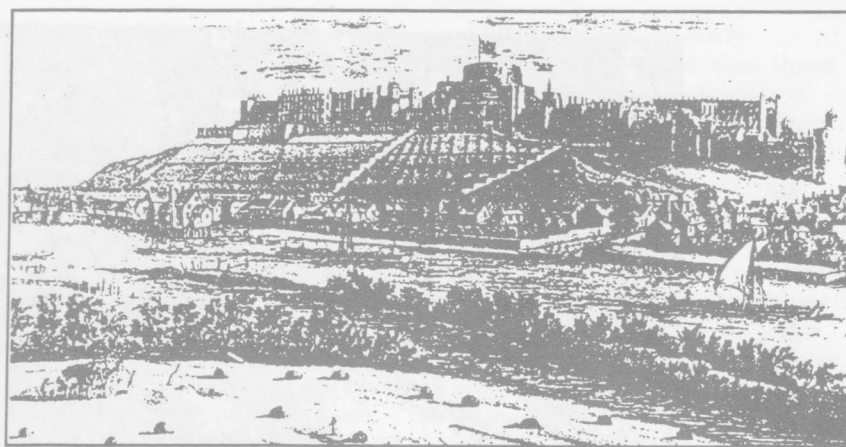
The plot of the *Merry Wives* moves on to its climax, in which Falstaff dresses himself up as the ghost in order to make love to the mocking wives. Neither he nor they show any apprehension about creeping through Windsor Park at night, so there cannot have been much expectation that a real Herne the Hunter would turn up and spoil the fun.

Shakespeare's original audience were not the sort to be troubled with such fears, either. For one thing, the first performance of the *Merry Wives* took place well away from the haunted park, being put on at Whitehall in 1597. The audience consisted of courtiers, proud of their intellectual sophistication - short scenes were based on rather arcane parodies of a Latin primer and the latest in-joke

about a German nobleman (2). Local allusions to Frogmore fields, Datchet Mead and mine host of the Garter - lovingly explicated by local antiquaries - were meant to appeal, not to residents of the town, but to those who had taken lodgings there while the queen was in residence (3). The simplicity of country people is a recurring theme, and when Mistress Page assures us 'Yet there want not many that do fear/ In deep of night to walk by this Herne's Oak', the audience were meant to smile. Windsor people! Dear old superstitious bumpkins.

The allusion would lose all its effect if there had not been a real Herne's Oak, and a real ghost story to go with it. But the final scene of the *Merry Wives* is too carefully crafted in its dramatic effects to be a mere report of local folklore. There is a tree - the stagehands can rig one up, pasteboard with canvas leaves - around which all the characters can do their business; and somewhere in the props room is a pair of antlers - didn't we use them for that scene in *Doctor Faustus* where the man comes to the window wearing them on his head? Always good for a laugh, the old antlers/ cuckold gag (4). So Falstaff can use them for a disguise, which will leave his face fully recognisable by the audience while making him look silly. If some fairies are introduced to circle round the tree, tormenting Falstaff, that will keep the boy actors out of mischief in the Green Room and bring the play to an end with song and dance, plus working out the subplot in which pretty Nan Page elopes with her lover. Something of this sort ran through Shakespeare's mind when he thought out the play. Literal transcriptions of folk belief were not his line.

But was Shakespeare the only Elizabethan dramatist to take note of Herne? There is another text which according to some researchers embodies a second report of the legend. The version of the *Merry Wives* printed as a quarto volume in 1602 varies in many particulars from the



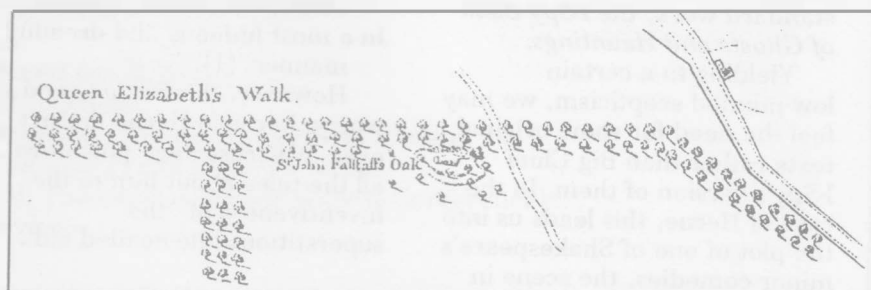
Windsor Castle in 1720.

familiar text which was published in folio in 1623. Of particular interest is the quite different wording of Mistress Page's speech, which begins:

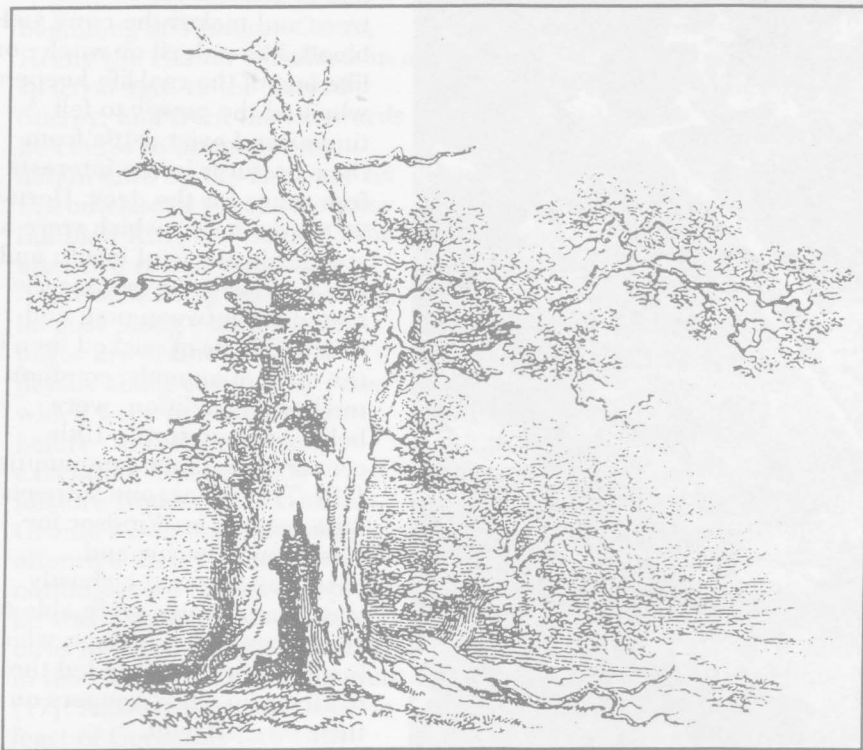
'Oft have you heard since Horne
the hunter died
That women to affright their
little children
Says that he walks in shape of a
great stag...'

Independent evidence? Not so. The Quarto text was put together after the original performance as a pirate version, prepared by someone in touch with the actor who played or understudied Falstaff. Scenes in which the fat knight played a part are more or less faithfully transcribed from memory, but the words of the scene where the wives plan to meet him at Herne's Oak - a scene in which the actor, *qua* actor, had no particular interest - are just hammed up to help the plot along (5). It seems that as far as the Quarto and Folio are concerned, two texts are not better than one.

The plays of Shakespeare had a mixed reception until the 18th century. The *Merry Wives* was neglected until the 1720s, but the time of its revival also happened to be the growth period of English tourism, and the inhabitants of royal Windsor were not slow off the mark in the production of guidebooks and visitor trails (6). A map of 1742 indicates 'Sir John Falstaff's Oak' - not, be it noted, Herne's Oak - next to a dell in the Little Park; this aged pollard tree was commemorated by a wood engraving in 1785 (another nearby oak, equally aged but 'maiden' or unpollarded, also had its adherents). In an aquatint Falstaff and the wives appear under the pollard tree, which has however been shifted about half a mile off site in order to make a pleasing composition with the Castle (7). Visitors could turn to the pages of Samuel Ireland, an author who visited Windsor in 1790 and whose admiration of Shakespeare was later to lead him to forge at least three new



The Little Park in 1742 showing 'Falstaff's Oak'.



Sandley's sketch of the pollarded oak in 1785.

plays as the work of the master. He wrote of Herne: 'Having committed some great offence, for which he feared to lose his situation and fall into disgrace, he was induced to hang himself on this tree. The credulity of the times easily worked on the minds of the ignorant to suppose that his ghost should haunt the spot' (8).

That is something new. There is nothing in the *Merry Wives* to suggest that Herne is a suicide, although the motif is common in ghost stories elsewhere, and Ireland's story may repeat one of the traditions which Shakespeare ignored while arranging his plot. The story of Herne's suicide is repeated by James Hakewill in his *History of Windsor* but it is doubtful whether this or later texts offer any kind of independent testimony; the Herne tradition is a set of whispering galleries in which every new author repeats and distorts those who went before (9). Eric Fitch, the most recent of the Herneloirists, repeats a number of unprovenanced variations on the tale, including the belief that the Hunter hanged himself after the king

had raped his daughter; that he went mad after being wounded by a stag, tore off the antlers, and bound them on his head; or that the ghost was not a stag-horned man at all but a white fire-breathing stag (10). These versions are mere embellishments of earlier sources, but they do suggest that traditions independent of Shakespeare could have some currency in the town.

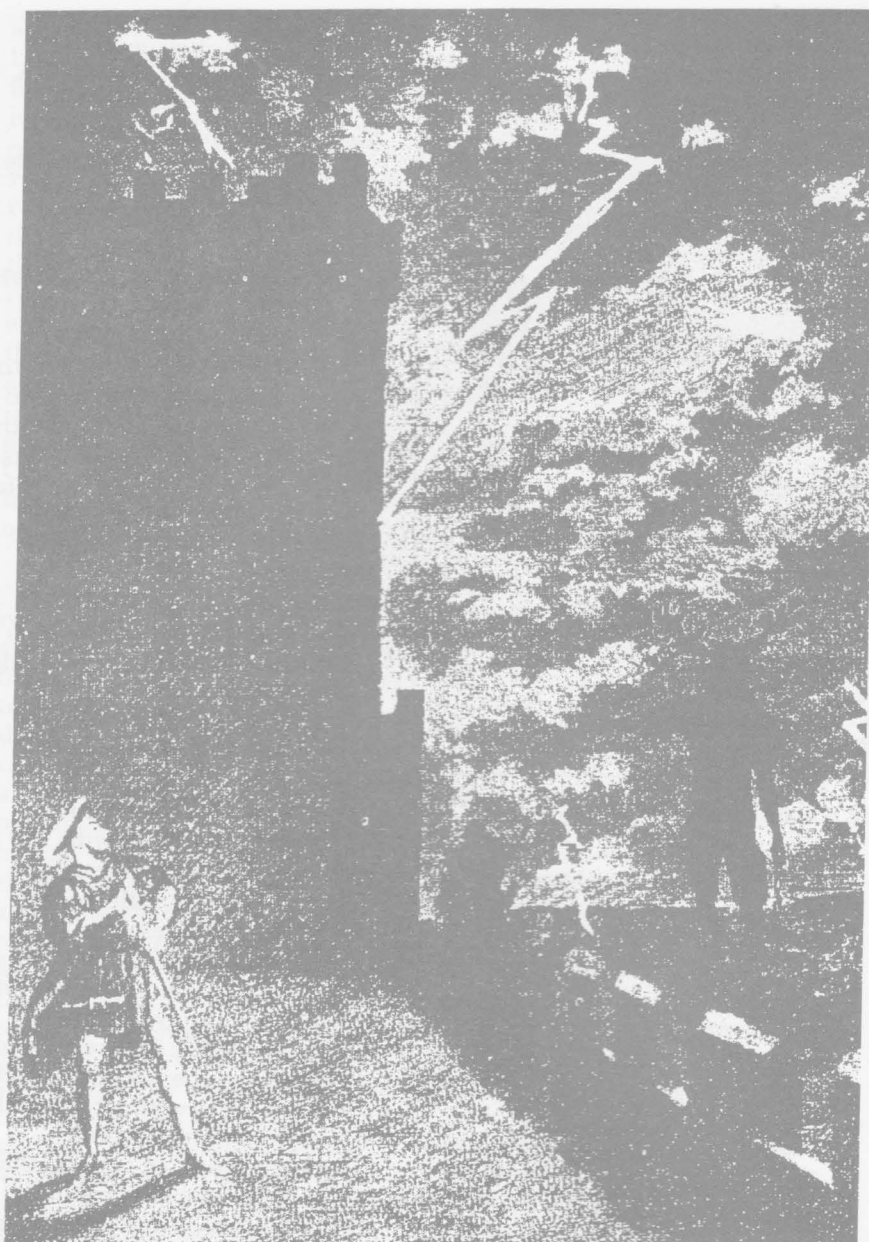
Herne's Oak did not last long as a tourist attraction. In 1796, George III - during one of the more lucid phases of his porphyria, when he was prepared to talk about trees rather than to them - ordered the felling of dead oaks in the Park, and down it came, much regretted by local poetasters. Like Voltaire's God, however, as soon as the tree did not exist it was necessary to invent it, and the Shakespearean tradition was transferred to the nearby maiden oak. The debate raging as to which of the two had been the original was not helped by a storm which blew down the maiden oak in 1863; it was replanted *in situ* (11). The ease with which Herne's Oaks were being replaced suggests a

degree of scepticism as to whether the tree identified in 1742 was really the one that Shakespeare had in mind.

Somewhere near the Castle, at any rate, an old oak tree stood in 1597; and Windsor people thought that it was haunted by a dead forester, who appeared in a form half-man, half-stag. That seems a very slender foundation on which to raise the edifice of speculation which now celebrates Herne the Hunter. There are other facets of his character, to be sure, but they emerged - or, to be less evasive, were made up - after 1790. The claim that the original, pre-Shakespearean Herne was a pagan god seems to rest on those stage props, the stag's antlers.

Support for this theory comes from an unexpected quarter. Fat Sir John, lurking under Herne's Oak for his midnight assignation with Mistress Ford, compares his disguise with that affected by the classical deities - 'Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa; love set on thy horns...' After paganism comes bestiality; Mistress Ford is to be 'my doe with the black scut'. All very reminiscent of the sex scene in Ted Hughes' *Gaudete* except, of course, that it's meant to be funny. The lustful Falstaff never gets to piss his tallow after all, and his venture into animality ends with the rueful conclusion 'I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass' (12).

The best laughs in the *Merry Wives* come from the indignity and humiliation of Falstaff, who in pursuit of his lecherous delusions finds himself treated as a basket of dirty washing, an old woman, and finally an animal. He makes the best of every situation, even those ludicrous horns, but the inference is plain: for the original audience, Herne the Hunter was not the epitome of forest majesty, but an example of how low you could stoop. We forget that times have changed: animality, which was once a foul reproach, is now rather popular.



Herne appearing to Henry on the battlements.
Cruikshank's illustration for Ainsworth's story.

But for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, anything that blurred the line between man and beast was disturbing and degrading (13). If you didn't laugh at it, you might shudder.

It is also easy to forget what 'a keeper here in Windsor Forest' actually meant to sixteenth-century ears. It was an age when forest law was maintained to uphold an elite of administrators, and not vice versa; officials were covertly seizing a range of perks which included rights to lift turf, cut underwood, and cull the deer, some of which seem to have

survived the proliferation of their official guardians. The inhabitants of Windsor town, as well as the denizens of the Forest, knew enough about this shady work to make them bitter. Their fields or gardens lay open to the deer, against which they were not suffered to raise a hand, while the keepers - exploiting both deer and forest, to no-one's advantage but their own - might visit indignities upon the people among whom they were billeted (14).

The original Herne the Hunter can best be understood as an epitome of hatred, ridicule

and contempt. He blasts the trees and makes the cows yield blood, like a devil or witch - or like one of the real-life keepers who had the power to fell timber and evict cattle from their pastures in the interests of free range for the deer. Herne wears the horns which were a standard vehicle of insult; and like a monster he crosses the boundary between man and beast. Ghosts of wicked men in the form of animals, common in mediaeval tradition, were believed in up to the 19th century in remote communities (15). There was, one suspects, little respect in Windsor for forest law. Fearing and despising Herne the ghostly stag/man, people were able to vent some of the passion which might otherwise have led them to string up a few keepers on their own account.

But Windsor Forest was enclosed for agriculture in 1813, a hundred years after the last Swanimote Court had been held, and the long affray between keepers and citizens found an end. The town had new priorities: at the Castle, Jeffrey Wyatt was busy demolishing the snug but undignified lodgings of George III for something more chillingly grand and Gothic. The past had been discovered, and it was picturesque. In 1843 a romantic novelist, Harrison Ainsworth, appeared on the battlements in search of copy.

Ainsworth was a pro. Having discovered his abilities in the line of melodramatic narrative, he had brought out five novels in the previous three years, drawing between them on the history of three centuries (16). As this might suggest, he did not allocate more time than was strictly necessary to pursue research or soak up atmosphere. An Ainsworth romance came out week by week, in the manner of a soap opera, published as episodes in his own magazine. Every new chapter introduces some fresh character to be woven in the plot, or invents some new twist for an existing one. Right at the

beginning of *Windsor Castle*, Herne the Hunter manifests in a spectral light to the Earl of Surrey, and from then onwards he comes to dominate the action until by the last page he has outclassed every character but bluff King Hal himself. The attentive reader will catch Ainsworth doing his research as he goes along - suddenly his pages are crammed full of details about costume or venery which were not suspected before - and Herne is no exception. One of the few folklore studies then available, Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, offered a hint: Grimm knew nothing about Herne except that he was a hunter, but on this basis he was briefly mentioned in the chapter on the Wild Hunt (17). Ainsworth read this eerie feast of Germanic lore with close attention. The romantic terror of the supernatural hunt was transferred bodily from the Black Forest to Berkshire; even the white owl which appears initially as Herne's companion was taken from Grimm's account of Tooting Ursula, who precedes Hackelberg of Saxony. The Hunt rampages through Windsor Park during the earlier part of the romance, at first as a ghostly chase, afterwards (when it is time to be written out of the serial) as a real band of outlaws who can be rounded up and hanged.

When the Earl of Surrey discusses Herne's origins, one companion tells him that the Hunter was a suicidal keeper - an authentic story, insofar as Ainsworth derived it from the existing guidebooks. But another member of the party suggests that Herne is a wood-demon who seeks to purchase souls. It is in this guise, as a fiend not a ghost, that he stalks through the book, surfacing even within the Castle impiously disguised as a friar, and bargaining for the soul of more or less everyone from Wolsey to Anne Boleyn. He doesn't offer these terms to Henry, apparently assuming that his soul is pretty much in the bag already, but he does appear

to him on the terrace in a terrific thunderstorm to prophecy a forthcoming reign of blood.

Ainsworth's piecemeal method of composition had its disadvantages. Halfway through the book, the narrative breaks down altogether and there are five chapters giving tourist information on the Castle. When the romance resumes, with Herne and his followers more prominent than ever, Ainsworth felt the need to provide his anti-hero with a better pedigree and tells a new tale of how he came to haunt the Forest (18). Herne was an honest and skilful huntsman who saved the life of his king from the attack of a stag, but himself received a fatal wound. On the advice of 'a tall dark man...mounted on a black, wild-looking steed', Herne's life is saved by binding the stag's antlers on his head; and the same mysterious figure bargains with Herne's rivals to make him lose all his hunting skills - at an unspecified price. The dark stranger introduces himself as Philip Urswick, but any Victorian reader of supernatural melodrama would have recognised him as the Fiend, and I must confess I find it a little chilling to see our modern neo-pagans incapable of drawing the same conclusion (19). After Herne - who has lost all his powers of woodcraft - has committed suicide, the other foresters return to the diabolical Urswick, and he instructs them to follow their dead master in the hunt every night; at last justice catches up with them, and they too are hanged from the branches of Herne's Oak.

Stirring stuff, but the credit for it must go to Ainsworth and not to local tradition. The story is put together using themes such as the infernal bargain, the hazards of the chase, the hanging of Herne's band and the interview between him and the king - all of which have already appeared separately in the earlier pages of the romance. Like Herne's association with the Wild Hunt itself, the story is

the work of a melodramatic novelist committed to penning a chapter every week (20). That makes it all the more curious when we find that Herne has really been seen around the Park in just the manner invented by his biographer.

For fifty years after the publication of *Windsor Castle*, it is true, Herne lay low. Absence of evidence here carries more weight than usual, for Victorian ghost-hunters were crashing snobs and any hint of a Shakespearian spook riding in full view of the Queen's residence would have been seized on with glee. After Ainsworth, Herne's fate was to be entwined with royalty, and when he next appeared on stage in 1902 - for Basil Hood's operetta *Merrie England* - we are told 'there is nothing to fear from Herne. He only appears, they say, when the Sovereign contemplates crime' (21).

Fearlessly, Edward VII had a new Herne's Oak planted on the original site in 1906. It was under this modest sapling that the Hunter was seen standing on moonlit nights by a retired colonel, looking out of the window of his lodgings in the Castle, in 1915 or so (22). At about the same time an Eton schoolboy was making friends with a retired keeper, who told his credulous young acquaintance that he had often seen Herne and his wild following (23). If so, the old man was doubly privileged, for Herne normally reserved his appearances for the upper crust - the sort of people, it seems, who might do a bit about hunting themselves.

In 1910 Evan Baillie, son of a Castle official, heard the sound of a horn and hounds following the chase. When Lord Burton was at Eton during World War I, he heard the baying of hounds and the winding of a horn in the Great Park (24). Other Eton scholars followed suit; one lad heard the sounds while riding in the Park in about 1916, while in the 1930s two boys rushed back to College with the news that an invisible hunt had rushed past

them, brushing them with cold air (25).

The baying of Herne's hounds, and the pounding of his horse's feet, were heard in 1926 by the wife of Walter Legge, herself a JP and well connected (26). She was standing outside her house in Old Windsor and heard the sounds at midnight; a fortnight later the experience was repeated for her and her daughter. The noise suggested a hunt coming towards Old Windsor from Smiths Lawn, or towards Bears Rails from the Copper Horse. Research by Colin Wilson, published in 1978 and again (with the references to leys decorously altered to spirit lines) in 1993, drew attention to the Long Walk which runs southwards from the Castle, and from which Herne's ride seems to have begun (27). The Walk is certainly a straight track, as Watkins had already noted, but it is not a particularly old one. Charles II bought the land needed to set out this tree-lined avenue in 1680, and it is clear from a map of 1607 that there was no previous alignment on the site (28).

With time it became a settled belief that the blowing of a horn might be mysteriously heard in the Park or Forest. In 1964 Ruth Tongue passed on an uncanny tale of two Windsor youths and a London teddy-boy who are out in the forest for a little light vandalism when they come across an old horn. The teddy-boy blows it, and stirs up an invisible host which pursues him as far as the church and shoots him down. As with many of Tongue's stories, this bears the unmistakable stamp of her own inventions, despite being attributed to a Berkshire morrisman (29). In these stories Herne is heard but not seen. The young guardsman who panicked in 1976 and shot at a statue, because he saw it growing horns, cannot really be brought as evidence to the contrary. His adjutant said kindly 'He had obviously heard stories from older soldiers. When you are on a lonely guard in the middle of the night,

imagination can do funny things' (30). Less easily explained was a sighting of a man wearing antlers who walked out of some undergrowth and vanished behind some trees in the 1920s; this however was at Cookham Dene, in the purlieu of the Forest but well away from Windsor (31).

It seems that the growing interest of the modern world in Herne has not been reciprocated, since his hunt has not been seen or heard in Windsor Park since the 1930s. There was a time when the winding of the horn and the baying hounds were held to prognosticate calamities; rumours of them were abroad before the Depression in 1931, the Abdication in 1936, the war in 1939, and the King's death in 1952 (32). There the record ends. I suspect that if the Wild Hunt were to be heard now in full chase before every crisis in the royal family, nobody in Windsor would get much sleep.

It would be undignified for Herne to appear as a mere ghost now that he has been elevated to the rank of a god. Credit for this apotheosis, as for so much else, seems to go to Margaret Murray. Drawing on memories of Ainsworth's book (then a schoolroom classic) she notes in *The God of the Witches* that 'Herne the Hunter, with horns on his head, was seen in Windsor Forest by the Earl of Surrey' and adds that 'Cernunnos...in English parlance was Herne' (33). In vain does the reader object that Cernunnos, as a general name for Romano-Celtic deities wearing horns, is a scholarly convention; the term is extended for the sake of convenience from a single Gaulish altar now in the Musée Cluny. Etymology has its own fascinations: nine other versions of the name Herne have been proposed by recent authors, many prepared to advance multiple interpretations without pausing to reflect that if any one of these is right the others are likely to be wrong. Among profuse references to Cornwall, Cerne Abbas, herons

and hoarstones it is possible, eventually, to discover that Herne is a common mediaeval surname.

The same combination of abundance and irrelevance characterises much modern literature on Herne. Turning the diligently compiled pages of recent works is like straying into a magnificently eclectic anthropological junkshop, stored with the plunder of every age and nation except for the one which matters - Tudor Berkshire. Herne has to be understood in context. His antlers meant something to the original 16th-century audience: what they meant, I have tried to suggest, though I may be wrong; but comparison with the antlers of Star Carr, Neolithic Bulgaria and the Tungus tribesmen will not shed any further light on the matter.

The difference in research which I have indicated is not one of facts, but of method. There is a temptation - and some interpretations of paganism have tended that way - to imagine a lost religion from which existing faiths and folklore have descended, a kind of ideal or primeval belief which can be arrived at by comparing cults and stories from all over the world. There ain't no such animal. Antlers can symbolise whatever people want them to symbolise: meaning doesn't reside in them as bits of horn, but as elements in a performance put on for the benefit of an audience. First and foremost, from Falstaff's disguise to *Robin of Sherwood*, Herne is a character. He has meant many different things in different performances, from a comic epitome of lust to an eerie merchant of souls. I can find no evidence of a pre-1597 performance in which he played the part of a god. Herne, I suspect, is real as well as imaginary. Behind the performance which Mrs. Walter Legge put on for the newshounds when she told her ghost story in 1926 lies another, lonely performance in which the Hunter himself created sounding horns

and baying dogs for her benefit. But that midnight enactment was itself derived from the writings of a Victorian hack: performances, even when they are not mounted by human beings, are still textual. And it is the triumph of the latest literary invention, the pagan Herne, which has enabled him to retire from his crude apparitions. Why go crashing through the undergrowth to impress a few schoolboys when you could be appearing nightly in a TV serial?

References

- 1: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* IV iv 28ff; p118 in the Arden edition by H.J. Oliver, Methuen, 1971.
- 2: See the Arden edition p.xlvi for date of performance and pp.xxix, xlvii for aristocratic allusions.
- 3: E.g. Robert Tighe and James Davis, *Annals of Windsor*, Longman, 1858 1p666ff, and Olwen Hedley, 'Shakespeare's Windsor', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* Vol. 61, 1963 pp74-78.
- 4: See *Faustus* IV ii 70-120. That the play was familiar to the audience of the *Merry Wives* is shown by the allusions made in I i 120 and IV v 65.
- 5: The status of the Quarto is discussed in the Arden edition pp.xiii-xxxvii. The theory of independent origin has been abandoned since 1920 but still surfaces in, for instance, John Matthews, *Robin Hood*, Gothic Image, 1993 p47.
- 6: The Arden edition p.xii notes 18th-century revivals of the play. The flow of Windsor tourist literature began in 1742 and continues unabated: Sue Reynier, *The Development of Tourism In Windsor*, typescript in Windsor Library p24.
- 7: Tighe and Davis, op. cit. p685ff, summarise the claims of the two rival oaks. The aquatint is reproduced by Jennifer Westwood, *Albion*, Paladin, 1987 p88.
- 8: Samuel Ireland, *Picturesque Views on the River Thames*, London, 1792 2pp15-18.
- 9: Cited by Michael Petrie, *Herne the Hunter - A Berkshire Legend*, Reading, 1972 p94.
- 10: Eric Fitch, *In Search of Herne the Hunter*, Capall Bann, 1994 pp7-9. Cf. William Menzies, *Windsor Park and forest*, Windsor, 1904 p38 - naked horn-carrying Herne - and Elliot O'Donnell, *Family Ghosts*, 1930s? p23 - white stag.
- 11: Petrie, op. cit. pp5-9.
- 12: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* V v 4, 18, 120.
- 13: See Keith Thomas, *Man and The Natural World*, Penguin, 1984 pp36-50.
- 14: I rely largely on E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, Peregrine, 1977 notably pp41, 60, 63, 99. His narrative relates to the 1720s, but the grievances involved were endemic in any system of forest law.
- 15: For mediaeval theriomorphic ghosts, see Ronald Finucane, *Appearances of The Dead*, Junction Books, 1982 pp63, 80-81; for later ones, Katherine Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folktales*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971 B1 pp487, 560.
- 16: See the entry on Ainsworth in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. There are 52 chapters in *Windsor Castle*, which suggests a production target of one chapter a week for a year.
- 17: Jacob Grimm, translated by James Stallybrass, *Teutonic Mythology*, George Bell, 1883 Vol.3 p942, Herne, p922, Tutosel. This Ursula had been a nun, a feature afterwards incorporated by Ainsworth in the sub-plot of Mabel Lyndwood.
- 18: *Windsor Castle* chapter 31.
- 19: Urswick's name exemplifies Ainsworth's slapdash method of composition. Because an earlier chapter had been set in the Urswick chapel, a real corner of St. George's, commemorating a former dean, the name came incongruously to his mind for a devil five chapters later.
- 20: Even Petrie, after chronicling Wild Hunt traditions for the best part of his book, has to admit that 'in the case of Herne himself . . . there is no direct evidence of the stories that must have surrounded him in the middle ages', op. cit. p94. An apparent German reference to Herne exists only in Petrie's translation, p46; the hunter Horns from Jutland looks promising, but turns out to be a scribal error for H'uens or Hwons, p54, *quaere* if not Huon of Bordeaux.
- 21: Cited in Petrie, op. cit. p101.
- 22: Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies*, Penguin, 1977 p220.
- 23: Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Quest for Merlin*, 1985.
- 24: Fitch, op.cit. p126; Petrie, op.cit. p101.
- 25: Hector Bolitho, *The Romance of Windsor Castle*, Evans Bros, 1946 p60; Elliot O'Donnell, *Haunted Britain*, Rider, 1948 p7.
- 26: Peter Underwood, *A Gazetteer of British Ghosts*, Souvenir, 1971 p248; *Windsor Express* 22 Oct.1976; Angus Macnaghton, *Windsor Ghosts and Other Berkshire Hauntings*, Windsor, 1976 p33.
- 27: Colin Wilson, 'A Windsor Investigation', *The Ley Hunter* 79, 1978 pp6-9. and 'The Windsor Horror', *The Ley Hunter* 118, 1993 pp16-18.
- 28: Alfred Watkins, *The Old Straight Track*, Methuen, 1925 p224; Olwen Hedley, *Round About Windsor and District*, Windsor, 1948 p58. Norden's 1607 map of the Little Park is reproduced by Petrie, op.cit. p6. Herne's 1926 ride did not proceed along the Long Walk towards Windsor, as claimed by Wilson, but away from it towards Old Windsor.
- 29: Katharine Briggs and Ruth Tongue, *Forgotten Folktales of The English Counties*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970 No.24.
- 30: *Windsor Express* 1st Oct.1976; reported at the time in *The Ley Hunter* 73 p16 and *fortean Times* 18 p24.
- 31: Angus Macnaghton, *Haunted Berkshire*, Countryside Books, 1986 p25.
- 32: Underwood, op. cit.
- 33: Margaret Murray, *The God of The Witches*, Sampson Low, 1931: I quote pp34, 38 of the 1953 edition.

AT THE EDGE

on the World Wide Web

At about the time the last issue of *At the Edge* was being printed and distributed I made better-than-expected progress setting up World Wide Web pages for *At the Edge* and Heart of Albion Press. This means that this is the first chance I have to inform readers of this most exciting project - even though the site has been live since 23rd May.

Those who have not yet had the opportunity to 'surf the Net' may well want to accuse me of being fashionable and trendy. Those who have put their toe into the oceans of cyberspace will know that the search engines already offer a profoundly disconcerting means of accessing all the information that has been uploaded. These search engines take less than a minute to trawl through all 12 billion words of text currently on the World Wide Web (WWW) and all the text currently on InterNet use groups, coming back with links to every reference to the most obscure key words.

Not all these references are intrinsically valuable - there are many lists-of-lists and passing references. For instance, a search for 'King Arthur' brought forth an American High School student's homework project. The reference to Arthur was a passing comment in the midst of the author's candid self-assessment of how her life was being shaped by denial! Searches of 'altered states of consciousness' however, brought forth much useful material which may or may not find its place in academic research. 'Prehistoric rock art' is another fruitful search, this time yielding

sites with galleries of pictures. By contrast, 'werewolves' was a disaster - hundreds of links, but every one to character definitions for various role-playing games!

The disadvantage of the WWW and InterNet is that most of the users are American - rock art, for instance, gets good coverage for the southern USA but fares more badly for Europe. This will change, perhaps more rapidly than anyone in Britain anticipates.

The WWW already offers staggering possibilities for exchanging information. But, in perhaps as little as five years' time, it will have evolved into something far more powerful, in ways which can not be predicted in detail [1]. Perhaps it would be wrong to predict that the printed page will be dead within ten years but what is about to happen in 'information technology' could be equally, if differently, profound.

What is already quite clear is that the WWW enables *alternative* viewpoints to be aired. Indeed, one is more likely to find the weird and wonderful than the orthodox! The down side is that this, inevitably, means that there is much that should best be treated as a possible 'spoof'. The 'upside' is the ability to disseminate information readily. While 'small presses', such as my own Heart of Albion Press, have produced a variety of printed books and booklets that would not necessarily interest major publishers, the underlying problem is to make people aware of their existence (even within the UK). The WWW cuts through that problem

effortlessly. It is world wide, easily searched with keywords, and above all. (almost) free.

The same advantages should apply equally to more orthodox research too. While the InterNet is perhaps better used than WWW by academics, some progress with informative university-based WWW sites is being made - although too many are still promotional facades with little depth. Academic archaeology is relatively well-supported. Several on-line journals exist, or are about to be launched. These are 'moderated' and subjected to the usual academic peer-review processes. While this may filter out some of the ideas of interest to *At the Edge* readers, they will have an increasingly important role to play in the dissemination of academic research.

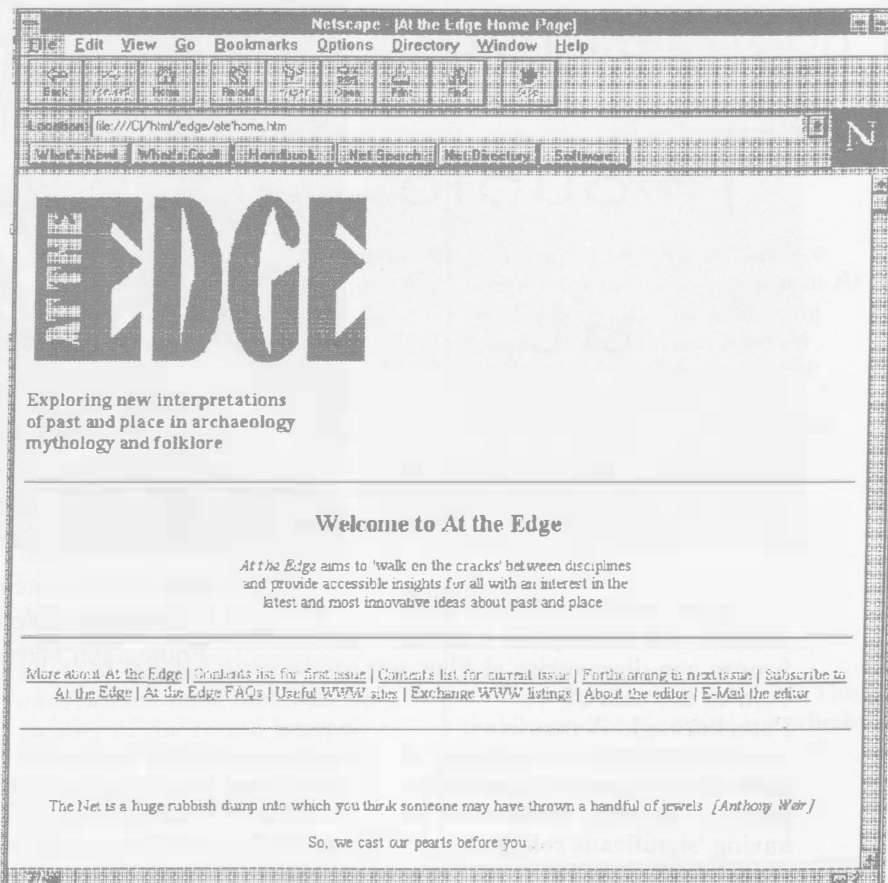
If we stick with the the good ol' fashioned term, 'earth mysteries', then this too fares quite badly (so far). An Associate Professor of Art History at Sweet Briar College, Virginia, seems to have been the pioneer, with some WWW pages specifically on earth mysteries that may evolve into something more substantial. *At the Edge* is pleased to be one of the first to use the WWW to exchange information on archaeology, folklore and mythology. Because sites are most likely to be encountered via search engines, there is a strong incentive to put up as much, and as varied, text as realistically possible. A substantial proportion of the major articles from *Mercian Mysteries* have been uploaded to inaugurate the site (no less than about 1.5 megabytes of

text and pictures). Articles from *At the Edge* will normally be uploaded six months after publication on paper, steadily building up a full archive of fact-filled WWW pages.

Despite the trend for WWW sites to be based on stunning graphics, with minimal text, I am taking the counter view that those visiting *At the Edge* pages will consider that it is the text that matters most. Illustrations are added where necessary for an understanding of the article. Given that some (but by no means all) of the text files exceed 20 kbytes, few users will appreciate having to wait for several large picture files to be downloaded as well. Pictures are all reduced to a compact file size, even though this means that quality is not necessarily stunning. One of my plans is to provide small 'thumbnails' which link to larger colour pictures - so the WWW version will provide more than the paper version can offer!

One of the tactical weaknesses of WWW is the impossibility of enforcing copyright and the tendency of many users to ignore copyright claims and regard everything as 'public domain'. This is a particular problem with pictures and is the main reason why I am holding back from providing links to large colour pictures. In the final analysis, *At the Edge's* WWW site is there to draw attention to the 'physical' magazine - which only exists because of paid subscribers. Maybe the *At the Edge* WWW site will evolve to enable subscribers to have privileged access to password-protected areas, but this is an option for the future, as it is counter-productive to increasing awareness in these early days.

At the Edge's WWW site also includes lists to many useful (or merely entertaining) WWW sites elsewhere. Visitors to the site will also see up-to-date indications of the contents of the forthcoming issue - including the titles of new books sent for review. Above all, there is a



facility for visitors to the WWW site to e-mail the editor with feedback, comments, suggestions, updates or whatever. To me, the prospect of such feedback is in itself full justification for the site's existence.

My 'associated' Heart of Albion publishing activities also have a WWW site at <http://www.gmtnet.co.uk/indigo/albion/hoaphome.htm>. One of the titles, *Gargoyles and Grotesque Carvings of Leicestershire and Rutland*, has already been uploaded in full. Given enough spare time, Heart of Albion will be expanding into more and more electronic publishing (not necessarily all uploaded to WWW pages) - *Little-known Leicestershire and Rutland - the hypertext* being the first of these to be made available.

This article can be found on WWW at <http://www.gmtnet.co.uk/indigo/albion/ateonwww.htm>

Notes

1: Your aging editor is probably one of the first to have been taught BASIC programming while in sixth form (in 1970), and can not only remember the advent of the pocket calculator but had hands-on involvement with early desk-top computers, such as Commodore 64s and Acorn BBCs. Despite pushing the Acorn to its limits for scientific data acquisition and processing, there is no way I could have imagined that less than ten years later affordable personal computers would have the power to handle the desktop publishing and image-processing used for Heart of Albion, *Mercian Mysteries* and, now, for *At the Edge*. Such meteoric but unpredictable developments are inevitable when users take powerful technology and find more and more things to usefully do with it. The WWW has every potential for equally dramatic evolution.

Serious Trouble at Flag Fen



I hope that most *At the Edge* readers will be familiar with the bronze age discoveries at Flag Fen, to the east of Peterborough. A massive wooden structure comprising of lines of posts and a huge timber platform is being interpreted as having 'significant religious aspects'. The artifacts associated with this mass of waterlogged timber include hundreds of metal objects (many of which have been deliberately broken), human and animal bones, plus pottery and other items.

So far only three per cent of the known extent of the site has been investigated. Lowering of the water levels in the fens means that timber and other archaeological evidence is disappearing before excavations can reveal the remains.

Those who have been to Flag Fen will confirm that the visitors centre brings to life these vestiges of Bronze Age life in an exemplary manner, exciting the lay person as well as informing those with good background knowledge of archaeology.

The excavations at Flag Fen are financed through the Fenland Archaeological Trust (FAT). For reasons totally outside its control FAT has lost the majority of its income. The result is quite simple - without new sources of income they

cannot continue. Key staff have been made redundant and the site is kept open mostly by part-time employees and volunteers.

Ironically, the funding disappeared just when recent aerial photographs had revealed a previously unknown prehistoric landscape in adjoining fields - including what may be a burial site and temple.

Unless £92,000 has been raised by the beginning of July then the site will be closed down indefinitely and the team of experienced Bronze age and wetland archaeology specialists will be dispersed. This issue of *At the Edge* will go to press towards the end of June so I am unable to provide an final update. However, I spoke to Dr Francis Pryor, the Director of Archaeology for FAT, in the middle of June. He reported that £45,000 had already been raised but there were no clear indications whether the remaining £47,000 would materialise in time.

Donations to Fenland Archaeological Trust can be sent to:

Every visitor's memory of the Flag Fen excavations
- innumerable black, water-logged timbers!
Photograph taken June 1989 by Bob Trubshaw.

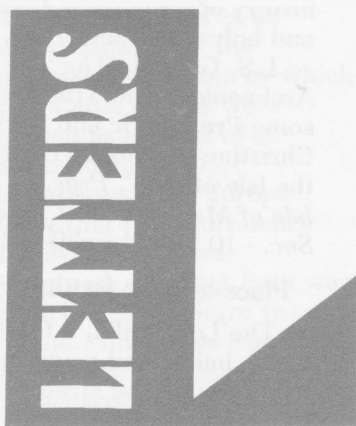
**FAT, Flag Fen Excavations,
Fourth Drove, Fengate,
Peterborough, PE1 5UR**

If you work for a company which would consider sponsoring displays and/or equipment for future excavations then this could be an excellent way to help the Flag Fen activities and provide your company with some positive publicity. Dr Pryor had details of their requirements with suggested sponsorship contributions and he would welcome the opportunity to discuss how best to give publicity to sponsors. Phone **01733 313414** for relevant information.

STOP PRESS

At the time this issue is being typeset I am in contact with the organisers at FAT regarding including an insert with the mailing of this issue of *At the Edge*. If this comes off then this will provide an update on these remarks. If there is no loose insert with this issue then please phone the above number for more information!

Bob Trubshaw



From Jeremy Harte

Calendrical architecture and Tara

Bob Trubshaw's 'The fifth direction' article in *At the Edge* No.2 brings a few thoughts to mind. Bricriu's Hall at Tara, with its calendrical architecture, reminds me of the rhyme about Salisbury Cathedral - 'As many days as in one year there be, As many windows here around you see . . .' (dating back at least as far as Aubrey's *Natural History of Wiltshire*) that was being printed on souvenir postcards well into this century, and is representative of a widespread genre for which I have a few more examples (don't mention this to Michael Behrend or the next post will be full of thousands, many of them in languages that I cannot even pronounce).

There seems to be a profound attraction in the idea of buildings keyed into time. Astrological ceiling paintings depicting the moment of foundation were an accepted trick well after the Renaissance (there is an example near where I live in the ceiling of Gatton Town Hall, which is a folly not a town hall, built in 1765).

Back to Tara. I thought the names of the earthworks, though not original, were better than 'high Victorian myth-making'. Don't they represent something out of the Dindshenchas, or is that a false identification of medieval

tradition with the landscape? I pick this up from Barry Raftery's *Pagan Celtic Ireland: the Enigma of the Irish Iron Age* (Thames and Hudson 1994), from which I also pick up one passing comment which made me reflect on my Dorset days. He notes how barrows survive in some of the hill forts or royal centres, as apparent funerary focuses for the feasting, games or whatever. Now several Dorset iron age hill forts - notably Abbotsbury, Chalbury and Maiden Castle - have a bronze age round barrow within the rings. These must have been retained deliberately. You would not keep something like that without giving it symbolic meaning. However, I do not know of any hill forts where the excavations have included the vicinity of the round barrow. Mortimer Wheeler did trench the Long Mound at Maiden Castle but I do not think he asked what the mound meant to the Iron Age occupants - they didn't in them days.

Competition Results

Congratulations to the five winners of the competition in *At the Edge* No.2. The following people should have received their copies of the paperback edition of Paul Devereux's *Secrets of Ancient and Sacred Places*:

L. Elves
C. Fisher
M.E. Jones
A. Norfolk
C. Upton

And the correct answer? The major neolithic monument which aligns with the eastern end of the Stonehenge cursus as **Woodhenge**.

The Ley Hunter Core Moot 1996

Heading the list of speakers at *The Ley Hunter's* Core Moot this year will be Thomas Dowson who will speak on the work he and David Lewis-Williams and other members of the Witwatersrand Rock Art Unit have been doing over the last decade or more on the southern African bushman rock art. They have established that such rock art images are associated with trance states of consciousness.

Recent work by Jeremy Dronfield at Cambridge University has confirmed that similar evidence of altered states of consciousness can be confirmed for neolithic rock art in Irish chamber tombs. At the time of going to press *The Ley Hunter* were still waiting confirmation that Dr Dronfield could also speak at the Core Moot.

Other short papers will also deal with the topic of 'Ancient Signatures of Trance' and other subjects.

The Core Moot will be held **Saturday 9th November 1996** at the University of London Student's Union Halls, Malet Street, London WC1. Tickets cost £10. Cheques payable to 'The Ley Hunter'. Send to: **The Ley Hunter, PO Box 258, Cheltenham, GL53 0HR**

Places are limited and early application is strongly recommended.

Phone or fax 01242 261680 for further information.

ABSTRACTS

Your temporarily-challenged editor (an expression which could mean many things but is intended to imply a chronic [sic] shortage of time) has been ably assisted in the compilation of these abstracts by predigested summaries from Jeremy Harte. His contributions are denoted by [JH].

Stupas as cosmology

Sacred sites may possess coded meanings which are not easily understood outside their cultural context. The shape of Buddhist stupas reflects a complex scheme of philosophical and cosmological reference, and they are meant to be read in this way as part of worship.

Jane Divan, 'The Stupa in Indian Art: Symbols and the Symbolic', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36 (1996) pp66-74, and Denis Byrne, 'Buddhist Stupa and Thai Social Practice', *World Archaeology* 27 (1995) pp266-281. [JH]

Siamese liminality

The identification of ritual monuments as boundary sites in prehistoric Britain tends to see them as symbolic rather than economic border zones. In Thailand the boundary between agrarian lowlands and hunter-gatherer highlands is associated with Buddhist monuments which act as exchange centres as well as symbolising the junction between Buddhism and animism.

Peter Grave, 'Beyond The Mandala: Buddhist Landscapes and Upland-Lowland Interaction in North-West Thailand AD 1200-1650', *World Archaeology* 27 (1995) pp243-265. [JH]

Liberated prophetesses

The Pythia, the prophetic priestess at Delphi, has long been considered as mouthing inarticulate ramblings in a drugged trance with a college of priests tidying them up for public release. Now a new study has called into question this male-dominated scenario. It seems the Pythiae gave clear prophecies on their own initiative.

L. Maurizio, 'Anthropology And Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105 (1995) pp69-86. [JH]

Clues from Anglo-Saxon charters

Several authors, noticeably Chris Hall, have been looking at Anglo-Saxon charters as a guide to sophisticated perceptions of landscape. They are also being increasingly used as clues to the division of early estates. For a regional study, see:

C.K. Currie, 'Saxon Charters and Landscape Evolution in the South-Central Hampshire Basin', *Proc. of the Hants. Field Club and Arch. Soc.* 50 (1995) pp103-126. [JH]

Place-names and parishes

Early Christian administration in the British Isles worked through large areas with central sacred places, later subdivided into smaller parishes. The role of minsters in Anglo-Saxon England is known, but there was a similar progression from the *anoed* unit in Ireland. Now place-name studies imply that this institution was also active in Gaelic Scotland.

Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Anmat in Scotland and the Origins of the Parish', *Innes Review* 46 (1995) pp91-115. [JH]

Manx pre-Christian religion

The Isle of Man falls within the Gaelic-speaking area where pagan and Christian traditions were fused more closely than in Lowland England. For reports on the possible pre-Christian

history of some early *keeill* sites and holy wells, see:

L.S. Garrad, 'The Archaeology and Tradition of some Prehistoric and Early Christian Religious Practices in the Isle of Man', *Proc. of the Isle of Man Nat. Hist. and Arch. Soc.* - 10 (1989) pp79-104. [JH]

Place-specific fertility rituals

The Lupercalia, a feast in which half-naked young men leapt around the streets whipping women as part of a fertility ritual, was one of the most archaic rites in Imperial Rome. It seems that the original god venerated, both as Faunus and Mars, combined fertility and warrior attributes. The ritual is closely related to the geography of primitive Rome.

T.P. Wiseman, 'The God of the Lupercal', *Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995) ppl-22. [JH]

Geomantic burials

Among some African tribes the role of the undertaker is concerned as much with geomantic divination of the grave site as with the disposal of the body. As in *feng shui* and the Malagasy *sikidy* tradition, the choice of ancestral graves is linked to the prosperity of the living.

Augustine Kututera Abasi, 'Lua-Lia, The "Fresh Funeral" - Founding a House for the Deceased among the Kasena of North-East Ghana', *Africa* 65 (1995) pp448-475. [JH]

Bride revisited

Recent research has identified places named 'Bride' as referring to St Brigit, a pagan goddess of the same name, or fertility rituals conducted before magic. Speculation on these names should be tempered, however, by a study which attributes at least some of them to Old English *bryd*, 'a plank'.

Carole Hough, 'The Place-Names Bridford, Britford, and Birdforth', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 39 (1995) ppl2-18. [JH]

Minerva not unique?

The cult of Sulis Minerva at

Bath has been seen as an isolated instance of the *interpretatio Romana* by which native Celtic deities were regarded as aspects of a Graeco-Roman deity. Comparisons from Europe suggest that the equivalence may have been more widespread, and that Bath was not the only cult centre to venerate Minerva as a goddess of holy wells.

Eberhard Sauer, 'An Inscription from Northern Italy, The Roman Temple Complex in Bath, and Minerva as a Healing Goddess in Gallo-Roman Religion', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 15 (1996) pp63-94. [JH]

Grid irons or odd balls?

An idiosyncratic study of the roads of Buckinghamshire identifies some of them as vestiges of an early landscape survey laid out in a regular grid pattern. Most of the county is scanned for right-angled roads which in the absence of historical reference to such a survey are dated to the Neolithic. It all sounds very Watkinsian, but appeared in a straight archaeological journal.

E.J. Bull, 'The Bi-Axial Landscape of Buckinghamshire', *Records of Bucks.* 35 (1993) ppl1-18. [JH]

Anti-Imperial pilgrimages

Pilgrimage is normally seen as a medieval response to the sacred landscape, or if it occurs in a later context is put down to survivals among a conservative population. In the Islamic world, however, pilgrimage enjoyed a nineteenth-century revival as a means of asserting non-Western identity before decolonisation.

Yitzhak Nakash, 'The Visitations of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi'i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century', *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995) ppl53-164. [JH]

Time Team given hard time

The deliberate exclusion of 'alternative' ideas (although

leaving plenty of air time for debunking dowsing) and 'ripping off' ideas and drawings are among the accusations made by those who helped Channel Four's Time Team with the work at Boleigh Fogue (broadcast March 1995).

Ian Cooke 'Total eclipse of the sun', *Meyn Mamvro* No.30 Spring/Summer 1996 p6-7

Earthlights at Kobe

According to Yoshizo Kawaguchi, a Japanese scientist, 'many people reported seeing [red and blue] lights an hour or tens of minutes before last year's Hanshin [Kobe] earthquake'.

'Japanese earth lights', *3rd Stone* No.23, Spring 1996 p5; original source not stated.

Spiral speculations

What did spirals mean to prehistoric people? Some imaginative ideas from Dr Terence Meaden.

'Spirals and what they meant in megalithic times', *3rd Stone* No.23, Spring 1996 p6-9

Neolithic monuments in the Golden Valley

An attempt to approach the landscape symbolism of neolithic tomb locations in the Golden Valley, Herefordshire.

'Monumentality and the neolithic', *3rd Stone* No.23, Spring 1996 p14-17

Long barrows and houses

Long barrows have for a few years been thought to be funerary 'houses', similar in size and shape to contemporary houses. Perhaps abandoned houses alongside occupied dwellings suggested the burial tradition. The clustering of houses in threes - and the clustering of long barrows in threes - on the Danube suggests a deeper symbolic context.

Magdalena S. Midgley 'The Earthen Long Barrows of Northern Europe' *Cosmos* Vol.11 No.2 Dec 1995 p117-123

Celtic hill figures

Archaeological excavation has suggested a late bronze age date for the Uffington White Horse.

Could the Long Man of Wilmington and the Cerne Abbas Giant be almost as old? A respected academic adds suggestions to a topic usually consigned to the fringe.

Miranda Green 'British Hill Figures: A Celtic Interpretation' *Cosmos* Vol.11 No.2 Dec 1995 p125-138

Cosmic writing

Some religious scriptures - including certain Taoist texts and the Biblical Ten Commandments - were first written by God or the gods in 'cosmic script'. Such divine works were attributed with awesome powers. Their subsequent dissemination and copying reveals much about the beliefs of the cultures.

Stephan P. Bunbacker 'Cosmic Scripts and Heavenly Scriptures' *Cosmos* Vol.11 No.2 Dec 1995 p139-153

Elf-infested spaces

Kevin L. Callahan at the University of Minnesota claims Ojibwa Indians in north Minnesota, and elsewhere in the American Midwest, see 'little people' for about thirty minutes during atrophine-induced (e.g. Deadly Nightshade) hallucinations. Callahan suggests these may be linked also to flying and werewolf experiences. Those in the second stage of alcohol withdrawal (i.e. two to three days after stopping drinking) report similar encounters with 'little people'. [Although not noted by Callahan, this puts me in mind of the expression 'elf-infested spaces', coined by Terence McKenna to describe his experiences with MDMA ('Ecstasy').]

Callahan also notes that loud sounds can trigger synesthesia and create disturbances of perception e.g. blending of foreground and background (an effect deliberately used by filmmakers).

[Found during an Internet surfing session but URL lost; several searches have failed to relocate the site. If any cybernauts succeed in finding

this gem of a site, please e-mail the editor!]

Polish Midsummer customs

Detailed information on the springtime and midsummer festivals - including rites at rivers and ritual fires.

K. Przybylska 'Sobotka - Polish summer solstice', *The Cauldron* No.80 May 1996 p18-19 [reprinted from *Sacred Serpent* No.5 Spring 1995]

More pagan Gothic ritual

Nineteenth century Valentine's Day customs in France are akin to the pagan Gothic 'goddess in cart' rituals described by Alby Stone in *At the Edge* No.2. In France, a woman with bared breasts stood in a cart, followed by a procession of young people. The procession led to the church where a Mass was held which was followed by all-night dancing and drinking. Childless couples offered the bare-breasted woman offerings of flowers in exchange for a fertility blessing. Back in twelfth century Germany a 'ship-like' cart containing a 'goddess' and a half-naked woman was pulled by women who also danced and sang bawdy songs.

Brian Bates, *Sunday Times* 11 Feb 1996 cited in *The Cauldron* No.80 May 1996 p29

Thor v. Serpent not a score draw?

Snorri suggests Thor's battle with the Midgard Serpent ended in a draw. But other sources suggest that in the earlier versions Thor did defeat the demon of the deep.

Thorskegga Thorn 'The one that got away?', *Talking Stick* No.21 Spring 1991 p20-2

Shamans were not only Siberian

Innovative research on the origins of the word 'shaman' reveal good evidence for it being deeply-rooted in Indo-European cultures. The enigma is why this word ended up being used by Tungus Siberians (from whence Mercia Eliade reintroduced the word 'shaman' into western

culture). This insight into a more widespread early use of the word 'shaman' has the potential for much further research and reassessment.

Alby Stone 'In search of the Indo-European shaman', *Talking Stick* No.21 Spring 1991 p37-39

North Europeans in China 2000 BC

Straight-nosed, blond haired people, naturally mummified by salt-laden sands, wearing garments woven in a similar manner to British and Celtic mummies predating 500BC have been found in the Tarim Basin in western China. This is now a desert but probably better suited to settlement in the past. These 'Caucasian' people seem to have existed (and been buried) alongside local people before 2000 BC but died out in the second century AD - but not before leaving a few documents in an extinct language akin to Celtic and German. The implications require some major revisions to the understanding of early Chinese civilisation.

Quentin Letts 'Mummies in China unravel historical certainties', *The Times* 10th May 1996 [cutting kindly submitted by R.W. Morrell]

Current archaeology in the Western Isles

In an issue all-but devoted to the Hebrides, a variety of exciting prehistoric sites are described - including the newly-discovered stone circle and kerb cairn near Callanish.

Current Archaeology No.147 May 1996

Bigger than Avebury

A huge Neolithic enclosure about twice the size of Avebury has been recently discovered at Hindwell near Knighton (Radnorshire). Little work has been done on the interior but Alasdair Whittle of Cardiff University is reported as saying that enclosures such as these were built for sacred reasons,

rather than for occupation or defence. 'They fit into that tradition of the bounding of open space, as part of a symbolically important landscape.'

"'Largest Neolithic site" found in central Wales', *British Archaeology* No.14 May 1996 p4

No they didn't! Yes they did!

The Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum debate on whether or not the Romans invaded Ireland (see Abstracts *At the Edge* No.2) has brought to the surface good links between the Irish myth of Tuathal, the Roman historian Tacitus and archaeological evidence. The title of the article reveals the conclusion.

Richard Warner 'Yes, the Romans did invade Ireland' *British Archaeology* No.14 May 1996 p6

Rock art of the Spanish landscape

Richard Bradley's investigation of prehistoric rock art in the context of the surrounding landscape has been extended into northern Spain. Tentatively, the rock art could suggest territorial markers for dividing hunting rights.

R. Bradley 'Rock art and the prehistoric landscape of Galicia' *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol.61 (1995) p347-370

Neolithic regions in Britain

Up until recently, Neolithic studies have tended to under-play the way monuments vary throughout Britain. This paper argues for four or five distinct regions, which are sustained over extended periods of time.

Jan Harding 'Social histories and regional perspectives in the Neolithic of lowland England' *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol.61 (1995) p117-136

Woodhenge ceremonies

A densely-presented study of 'formal deposition' at Woodhenge gives clues to the way the spaces within the monument were used for ritual.

Joshua Pollard 'Inscribing

space: formal deposition at the Later Neolithic monument of Woodhenge, Wiltshire' *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol.61 (1995) p137-156

Barrows not all for burial?

Not all bronze age barrows contain burials - but do reveal evidence of repeated feasting and ceremonial activities. A paper also interesting for the fact that it describes evaluation of soil samples stored for 25 years after the barrow was destroyed.

M.J. Allen *et al.* 'Food for the living: a reassessment of a Bronze Age barrow at Buckskin, Basingstoke, Hampshire' *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol.61 (1995) p157-189

Prehistoric Society publishes paper on leys

The same issue of *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* contains what should be headline news for all 'earth mysteries' journals - a map of prehistoric sites linked together

in alignments. That most of these 'leys' comprise of only three sites (and therefore might be considered to have good chances of occurring by chance) is excusable given the strong astronomical significance of many of the alignments.

In all fairness, this is only part of a wide-ranging assessment of a group of Irish monuments which has a number of other interesting suggestions to make, such as the extent to which individual monuments are visible from the surrounding landscape and a thorough assessment of the archaeoastronomy.

Michael J. Moore 'A Bronze Age settlement and ritual centre in the Monavullagh Mountains, Co. Waterford, Ireland' *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* Vol.61 (1995) p191-243

Are we still hunter-gatherers?

Is football a substitute for hunting? Is shopping sublimated gathering? Are soap operas surrogates for small extended

family units? And why are barbeques and real fires so emotionally satisfying? Indeed, are our emotional demands still those of the paleolithic? Perhaps we would have less anxiety if we established a 'Palaeolithically Correct' future?

Gustav Milne 'Why is there nothing like a real fire?' *British Archaeology* No.13 April 1996 p14.

My thanks to a number of *At the Edge* readers who have submitted cuttings. Unfortunately there seems to have been a proliferation of relevant articles in recent months and, despite this exceptionally lengthy Abstracts section, I have been forced to 'prune'. However, please keep contributions coming in - they are *always* appreciated even when not published.

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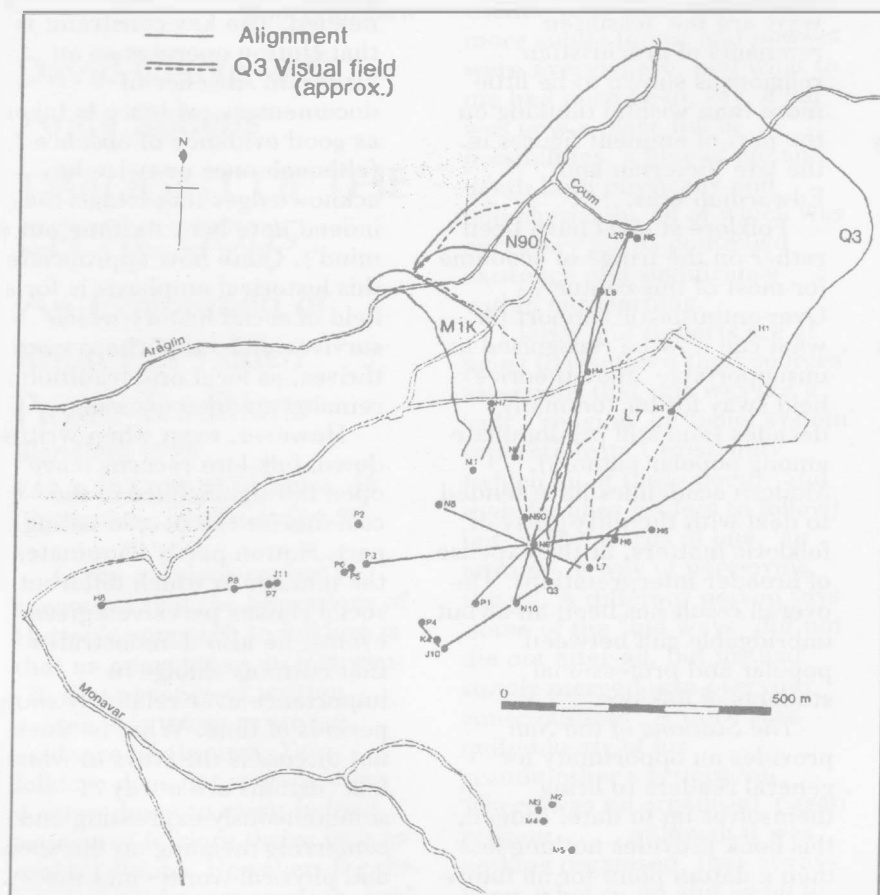
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See 'Prehistoric Society publishes paper on leys'

REVIEWS R

Ronald Hutton

THE STATIONS OF THE SUN

A History of the Ritual Year in Britain

Oxford University Press 1996
242 x 163 mm, 542 pages,
illustrated, hardback £19.99

Britain has a wide variety of folk customs associated with annually-recurring festivals. The history of these activities is complex - probably more complex than most people imagine. To cover this scope in a single book usually results in popularisation and superficiality. However, Professor Hutton has managed to provide an overview which is most certainly not superficial and, in some ways, most contentious.

The scope of *The Stations of the Sun* is a festival-by-festival survey drawing on all available historical records. These reveal the extent to which folk customs have changed over the centuries. Indeed, some 'traditions' - such as those associated with Christmas - are shown to be little over a hundred years old. Few folk customs date back before the Restoration and all have evolved and changed significantly.

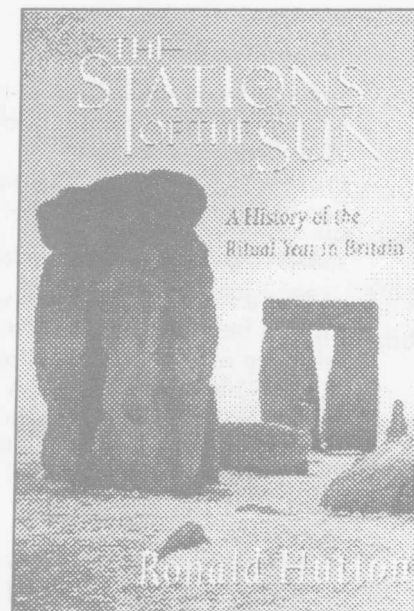
Hutton does not restrict himself to customs which are strictly calendrical but also discusses morris dancing, mummers' plays, Lords of Misrule and the like. Clearly, with such a broad scope, he is drawing upon the work of a number of folklorists who have

explored the history of specific aspects of British folk lore. This makes the book different from his *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford UP 1994; now available in paperback), which is based on the author's vast primary research in a narrower time span, and more akin to the work which brought him to prominence, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (Blackwell 1991), in that cogent summaries illuminate debates previously little-known except to specialists.

The Stations of the Sun is a remarkable work of synthesis which brings together ideas which previously lurked only in scholarly articles and monographs. It is also remarkable in the way this wealth of information is presented in a readable and accessible manner. These alone makes the work indispensable. But the greatest strength of this book is the way in which many popular assumptions about the 'timeless' nature of folk customs are stripped away. Above all, the popular belief that such ways are the 'fossilised' remnants of prechristian religions is shown to be little more than wishful thinking on the part of eminent figures in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Folklore studies have been rather on the fringe of academe for most of this century. Over-enthusiastic support for what can now be recognised as unsupportable 'meta-theories' held sway for far too many decades (and still predominate among popular authors). Modern academics have tended to deal with the nitty-gritty of folkloric matters, at the expense of broader interpretations. The overall result has been an all-but unbridgable gulf between popular and professional students of folklore.

The Stations of the Sun provides an opportunity for general readers to bring themselves up to date. Indeed, this book provides nothing less than a datun point for all future



studies of folk customs in the British Isles. Topics are dealt with thoroughly and, as would be expected, full references are given for those who are interested in specific themes. Although without question a major contribution to British folk lore studies, it is not definitive. Hutton himself provides pointers to where further historical research is needed. The key constraint is that Hutton operates as an historian. Absence of documentary evidence is taken as good evidence of absence (although once or twice he acknowledges that rituals may indeed date back to 'time out of mind'). Quite how appropriate this historical emphasis is for a field of social history which survives, indeed perhaps even thrives, as local oral tradition remains an open question.

However, even when written down, folk lore records leave open the significance of the customs for the people taking part. Hutton partly illuminates the manner in which different social classes perceived given events; he also demonstrates that customs change in importance over relatively short periods of time. What he does not discuss is the ways in which folk customs are a way of simultaneously expressing and conferring meaning on the social and physical world - and the

scope for considerable evolution in such concepts. The densely-woven and deeply-rooted cosmological symbolism inherent in folk lore is, understandably, beyond the scope of Hutton's opus.

Broadly speaking, at the level of interpretation folk lore studies seem to remain several decades behind other areas of anthropology - and even the best part of a decade behind the comparatively slow-moving revisionism in archaeology - in that (so far as I am aware) there have been few attempts to question the distinctly 'modernist' underlying stance or to open up a pluralism of interpretation. Hutton's approach is such that he has little need to touch upon such meta-issues but his achievement makes such debate and development much easier.

The Stations of the Sun is more than essential reading - it creates the potential for especially interesting times ahead for British folk lore studies.

Bob Trubshaw

David Clarke with
Andy Roberts

TWILIGHT OF THE CELTIC GODS

An Exploration of
Britain's Hidden
Pagan Traditions

Blandford 1996

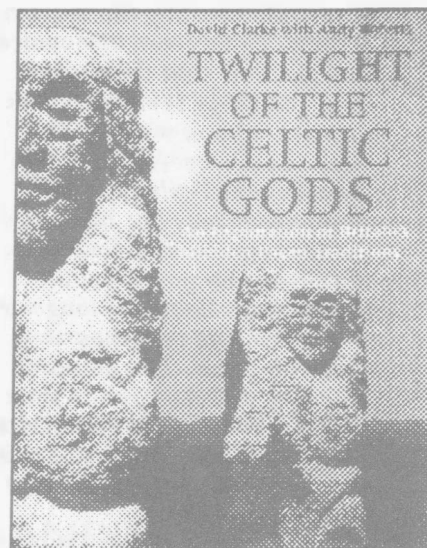
246 x 189 mm, 176 pages, 46
illustrations, hardback £16.99

In the previous review I suggested that the limitations of Hutton's approach to folklore is that he operates as an historian - in that absence of written evidence is taken as strong evidence of absence. Yet folklore does not require to be written down to exist; indeed, aspects of folklore thrive best as oral traditions. However, for the last hundred years or more, oral traditions have been vanishing -

more specifically, the individuals who picked up the tales, songs and sayings first-hand from older members of their families have themselves passed away. After the great campaigns of early folklorists in the early decades of this century, there seemed to be little possibility of primary fieldwork picking up on otherwise-lost traditions.

Well, the resolute efforts of David Clarke and Andy Roberts prove that such assumptions are untrue. The early chapters of *Twilight of the Celtic Gods* are based on first-hand accounts given by five 'informants' (very much alive) from the Peak District of Derbyshire and neighbouring south Yorkshire. They reveal that a traditional knowledge of the landscape, its plants and animals was passed to them. One of the sources describes how he was taken on long 'nature walks' through Wharfedale by his grandmother. 'She would tell me stories about [landscape features] and the powers that inhabited and protected them. Giants, fairy-folk, spirits and more subtle forces and powers were everywhere, and what to me had once been, say, a hill was now a place full of possibilities, a hive of life and death both physically and non-physically, all of which was necessary for its continued existence and significance within our learning.'

Clarke and Roberts are at pains to reinforce their sources' assertions that this was not a 'cult', 'religion' or 'belief system' separate from Christianity (which all of these people and their families profess to follow) but, in the words of one, 'an attitude, a way of perceiving things'. A different person says 'some of the "old ways" did not die out after all, but instead simply merged into everyday consciousness'. A third says quite bluntly of his grandmother's generation 'There was no organised 'pagan' religion . . . although it was nothing organised, they always knew what to do and when to do it'.



As mentioned in a footnote to my 'Paganism in British folk customs' article earlier in this issue, a number of prominent people in the modern pagan and wicca movements feel a need to assert that there has been some unbroken tradition of organised 'witchcraft' in Britain. However, the evidence they have published all suggests that we are seeing regional variations of this local 'wisdom' passed down within individual families.

Quite how old these traditions are is, of course, the big question. Clarke and Roberts do little to resolve this, apart from noting that the information they have obtained suggests a common basic approach over a relatively wide geographical area but with significant differences in detail between, say, adjacent villages.

These accounts form less than half the book. The remainder is concerned with rituals associated with *Tigh nam Cailliche*, the diminutive 'Hag's House' in Glen Lyon, Scotland (first 'discovered' by Anne Ross and reported by Clarke in *The Ley Hunter* No.120 [1993]) plus an overview of two of his other areas of research - so-called 'Celtic' heads and various 'screaming skulls' and the like, where bad luck comes to anyone who removes them from the building they 'protect'.

Whether any of these are really evidence of 'Celtic' (i.e. iron age) beliefs or customs is

kept wide open by the authors. If I may be forgiven one cynical thought, it is that these days their publisher seems never to produce a book without the word 'Celtic' or 'Arthurian' in the title and *Twilight of the Celtic Gods* may not have been the first choice of the authors. But do not be put off by the handle - this book is a long way from New Age rehashes of Celtic 'truisms'. The authors' ethnographic research in their own 'backyard' is commendable and deserves to be looked at in greater depth than this rather preliminary account.

Bob Trubshaw

Michael Dames

THE AVEBURY CYCLE

Thames and Hudson 2nd edition 1996

240 x 160 mm, 240 pages, fully illustrated, £10.95 paperback

It is a truism that reviews tell you more about the reviewer than the subject of the review. With this in mind, please, forgive an autobiographical preamble. Had Dames not written the first edition of *The Avebury Cycle* back in 1977, there may well not be *At the Edge*. His ability to 're-mythologise' a prehistoric landscape was way ahead of any other 'fringe' research back in the late 70s and, in my opinion, remains unmatched to this day. I visited Avebury many times during the early 80s 'under the influence' of this book, while also becoming increasingly aware of other 'earth mysteries' authors. By 1986 I was beginning to take an active interest in the landscapes of Leicestershire and Rutland which, in turn, led to *Mercian Mysteries* and hence *At the Edge*.

Dames has successfully created a modern-day myth which not only 'explains' but literally re-animates the neolithic remains of the Avebury area by drawing upon archaeology, landscape features,

mythology and folklore. This unique achievement is perhaps a result of a singular career - originally studying as a geographer and archaeologist, the author became a senior lecturer in art history, while also being commissioned to produce a number of sculptures for public spaces. An artistic approach, combined with a solid understanding of prehistory, is the unique foundation for *The Avebury Cycle*.

The strength of this book is that, even if every concept could be proven to be an archaeological fallacy (a most unlikely scenario), the overall attempt to 'weave a story' is effective. Which ideas work well and which are 'dubious' depends mostly on the preconceptions of the reader. I would certainly not want to spoil the enjoyment of others by projecting my own biases onto this 'Rorschach blot' of analogy and suggestion.

Many books written in the mid-70s would need considerable revision before being re-issued in the more critical-minded mid-90s. Instead, Dames has understandably chosen to let the original text remain, with only the slightest of additional information. Indeed, so far as I can tell, the changes are simply to add a one-page preface (which seems intentionally tangential in its remarks); to replace an appendix on Stonehenge with some concise remarks about recent discoveries of 'palisade enclosures' - noting that they align with his Lammas moon rise 'birth line' (although the publishers do not consider these new remarks require indexing!); an extra 50-or-so words added to a picture caption; and a slightly extended bibliography.

Those who own the original edition will not, I suspect, consider that they need to buy this revised edition. However, the continued availability of this pioneering and inspirational book is most

welcome. At a time when academic archaeologists are just beginning to accept the validity of analogy and the need to 're-invent' the past, Dames provides a role model which generally looks as good now as nearly twenty years ago.

Bob Trubshaw

John Michell

WHO WROTE SHAKESPEARE?

Thames and Hudson 1996

240 x 175 mm, 272 pages, 116 illustrations, £16.95 hardback

John Michell probably needs no introduction to *At the Edge* readers. His fondness for mystery and eccentric notions is reflected in the subject matter of various books. In this latest work he revels in the enigma behind the finest English literature - and, in the process, finds some of 'the crankiest minds of our age and culture'.

Visitors to Stratford upon Avon are led to believe that a local lad with little schooling and of rather dubious character was the author of the Bard's works. But the evidence to support this notion is all-but-non-existent. What evidence there is fits badly indeed. Despite strong and emotive defence by the 'Stratfordians', various scholars have proposed good arguments for Francis Bacon; 17th Earl of Oxford; 6th Earl of Derby; 5th Earl of Rutland; and even Christopher Marlowe (even though he was seemingly murdered before most of the plays were written!). And this is just the short-list of realistic contenders!

Argument and counter-argument weave thickly. The author of *The View Over Atlantis* unveils himself in the section which deals with acrostics, anagrams and other 'encrypted' code words. It is to Michell's great credit that he summarises all these scenarios concisely, without taking sides. Indeed, apart from strongly

dismissing any credence in the belief that the Stratford lad was the author of the plays, we are left with good reasons to suppose that any of the 'short-listed' candidates could have written some, if not all, of the Bard's opus. Without being explicitly stated, we are left wondering if the plays and sonnets we attribute to Shakespeare are most probably a deliberate use of the same pseudonym by a group of authors.

Above all, Michell writes in a thoroughly readable way which entertains as well as informs. I can only concur with the author's overview: 'It is a harmless, stimulating and instructive subject to dwell upon, which is more than can be said for many other types of obsession.'

Bob Trubshaw

David R. Harris (ed) THE ORIGINS AND SPREAD OF AGRICULTURE AND PASTORALISM IN EURASIA

UCL Press 1996
Paperback £19.95

This is a truly groundbreaking collection of essays, based largely on papers presented at a conference held at the Institute of Archaeology in London in 1993. David Harris has assembled an impressive array of scholars in a variety of disciplines to examine the beginnings of farming and herding and the impact they had on the early populations of Europe and Asia.

In the first section, the emphasis is firmly on theory. For example, Andrew Sherratt examines the happy accident of plate tectonics that allowed the right conditions for agriculture to arise in crucial regions; L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Colin Renfrew relate agriculture to

the human genetic map and language dispersal; and Tim Ingold casts an anthropologist's eye on the domestication of plants and animals. Others examine the domestication and spread of crops in the light of molecular biology, ecological and evolutionary theory, and epidemiology.

This is up-to-the-minute, state-of-the-art stuff that does much more than merely set the scene for the twenty case-studies that follow. The case-studies are divided geographically to cover southwest Asia, Europe, and from Central Asia to the Pacific coast. These combine to give a near-comprehensive picture of the evolution of farming in Eurasian prehistory, and show how the development of human culture and societies went hand in hand with the growth of agriculture and herding, and how each has helped shape the other. They include a number of offerings that would be diverting in any context, such as Hans-Peter Uerpmann's discussion of the origins of animal domestication, Ilse Köhler-Rollefson's look at the dromedary, and Time Bayliss-Smith's consideration of people-plant relations in New Guinea.

From sheep, goats, cattle and camels to corn, rice, fruit and nuts - this collection goes a good way toward showing how and why prehistoric populations cultivated and ate what they did, where they did. But while the individual contributions are interesting and absorbing in themselves, it is as a cross-disciplinary whole that this book really succeeds. Each essay illuminates aspects of the others that might otherwise have been under-stressed, and this adds both insight and dynamic to the matter at hand.

For the most part, the materials are presented in as straightforward a way as their technical natures permit, and are commendably readable. The collection is handsomely illustrated - there are all

manner of charts, graphs, maps, photographs, tables and line drawings to clarify the text - and satisfyingly large, weighing in at nearly six hundred dense, stimulating and informative pages.

This is an excellent book that fully deserves to become a classic of its kind, and the editor, whose own concise texts sandwich the others, deserves much credit.

Alby Stone

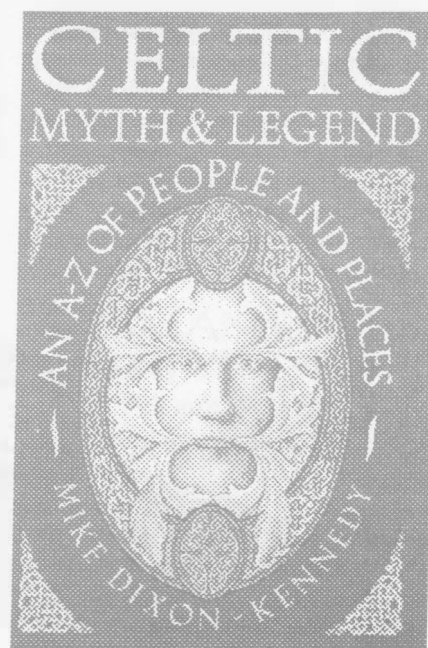
Mike Dixon-Kennedy

CELTIC MYTH AND LEGENDS

An A-Z of People and Places
Blandford 1996
234 x 156 mm, 304 pages,
hardback £16.99

This is an encyclopedia-style work, very much a companion volume to the same author's recent *Arthurian Myth and Legend* (Blandford 1995). The scope covers British - especially Irish - Celts. Inevitably much is left unsaid on specific topics but the approach is nothing if not comprehensive. A useful first point of reference for checking up on the multifarious heroes and protagonists of the myths and legends.

Bob Trubshaw



Courtney Davis and
David James

THE CELTIC IMAGE

Blandford 1996

276 x 219 mm, 128 pages, 78
illustrations (including colour),
hardback £16.99

Courtney Davis

CELTIC ORNAMENT

Art of the Scribe

Blandford 1996

276 x 219 mm, 96 pages, 100
b&w illustrations, hardback
£14.99

These two latest books are the latest in a line of general interest books on Celtic art and culture from Blandford. *Celtic Ornament - Art of the Scribe* deals with 'Celtic' manuscript art from the Dark Ages, the background of the monasteries and scriptorium that produced these works of art are discussed with details of the pigments, pens, scripts and symbols used. Most of the art is copied from the Book of Kells and Lindisfarne Gospels and all the art forms and symbols are dealt with.

The Celtic Image also uses Courtney Davis art but this time some of his modern pieces are given in full colour. The book is a whirlwind tour through the entirety of Celtic culture, from the Iron Age to the present day. The usual subjects are discussed, including Celtic

Christianity and crosses, sacred places, the seasonal cycles and Celtic warriors. The book is a good introduction to the world of the Celts but goes little beyond a coffee table book in its content. A whole chapter is also given to stone circles and megaliths, including two picture of Callanish, which is rather odd.

Courtney Davis's artwork is mainly of artefacts and buildings of the period but some of them mark a good progression to a less Celtic and more spiritual art form. Both of the books are informative and well-presented but I would recommend them for the general reader only.

Anthony Rees

Jill Boume (ed.)

ANGLO-SAXON LANDSCAPES IN THE EAST MIDLANDS

Leicestershire Museums 1996

A4, 196 pages, illustrated,
paperback £19.95

The eight chapters which make up this volume are revised from papers presented at a conference held in 1991. The approaches are varied, and extend from archaeology into place-name studies, topographical information and what may be termed 'historical geography'. The emphasis is strongly on Leicestershire although parts of neighbouring counties are drawn in to the discussions where necessary; one paper specifically discusses the ambiguity of boundaries between Leicestershire and south

Derbyshire in this period.

For those with a specific interest in either the Anglo-Saxon period or in Leicestershire this volume is most welcome and provides a wealth of detailed ideas. While the east midlands has long been associated with pioneering approaches to landscape history - all-but-synonymous with the work of W.G. Hoskins - this publication shows that there is much to be gained by looking in detail at the landscape, even where (as is the case for Anglo-Saxon Leicestershire) historical documents are scarce and archaeological data is tantalisingly patchy.

Bob Trubshaw

Jack Roberts

THE SACRED MYTHOLOGICAL CENTRES OF IRELAND

Bandia 1996

A5, 48 pages, 70 illustrations,
card covers £4.50

[Address given below]

Those who found interest in the article in *At the Edge* No.2 which looked briefly at the sacred centres of Ireland will find much of interest in this booklet. In a mere 48 pages there is excellent information on a large number of sites, with the archaeological information bang up to date. Those who have seen the same author's *The Sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland* will know that he is capable of filling every page with facts and attractive drawings.

The author shares an all-too-frequent preference for seeing prechristian Celtic religion as being dominated by goddesses. No doubt this helps sell books and booklets but such one-sidedness is hardly supported by the early medieval Irish literature (no matter how much one asserts that this was tainted by Christian scribes) or by any archaeological evidence.

From *The Celtic Image*



The Sacred Mythological Centres of Ireland



An Illustrated Guide

However this over-enthusiastic following of fashion does little to distract from the usefulness of this booklet.

For those who want to explore the sites and the sources of information further there are two problems. Firstly, there are no grid references for the sites (although many are large and/or well-known locally). Secondly, the bibliography gives incomplete information which might make it difficult for librarians to track down the more obscure items.

Bob Trubshaw

Jack Roberts THE STONE CIRCLES OF CORK AND KERRY

An Astronomical Guide
Bandia 1996

A5, 32 pages, fully illustrated,
card covers £3.50

There are over 100 stone circles in the west Cork and south Kerry area which makes it perhaps the greatest concentration of such circles

in Europe. Most seem to have been constructed so that specific solar and lunar events are marked by the layout of the stones - sunsets predominate.

This guide book provides concise information on the visible remains and the astronomical orientation. There is a sketch map showing locations and written directions to help locate the site. However, even if Irish maps for this area are not as reliable or up to date as those for the British mainland, I cannot understand why grid references were not provided to help further - stone circles can be tricky to find at the best of times. Given that only one circle is in state protection there is a serious risk that some of these circles will no longer be in place in a few year's time.

The author has published a number of other booklets and fold-out maps about the prehistoric antiquities of Cork and the Beara Peninsula.

These booklets are available direct from the publisher at:

Bandia, Commonagh, Leap, Co. Cork, Ireland; cheques payable to 'Bandia' (add 30p p&p per item).

Bob Trubshaw

The STONE CIRCLES of CORK & KERRY



AN ASTRONOMICAL GUIDE

Moyra Caldecott

MYTHICAL JOURNEYS, LEGENDARY QUESTS

The Spiritual Search - Traditional Stories from World Mythology

246 x 189mm, 176 pages, 16
colour and 20 b&w illustrations,
hardback £18.99

Storytelling is regaining ground although there are all too few anthologies which bring together useful collections of material from different traditions. Caldecott has adopted the theme of tales which feature journeys and quests, with examples from ancient Sumeria, Classical Greek, pharaonic Egypt, Arabia, Australia, Africa, Scandinavia, Russia, India, Surinam, Vietnam, Wales, Ireland and North America. Each story is prefaced with a short account of its origins and followed by a commentary, sometimes considerably longer than the tale itself.

All the tales are retold in a manner which would be accessible to children but nevertheless would be enjoyed by adults.

A useful source book for all those who tell tales, informally or otherwise.

Bob Trubshaw

Nevill Drury

SHAMANISM

Element 1996

276 x 195 mm, 96 pages, fully
illustrated in colour, paperback
£9.99

The latest in Element Books series which take the texts from the 'Elements of . . .' series and revamp them with full-colour illustrations. While clearly

addressed to the 'New Age' end of the spectrum of interest in shamanism Drury manages to keep in reasonable contact with ethnographical accounts of shamanism. The scope of the book means that the treatment generally lacks depth or discussion. Nevertheless an attractive and essentially sound introduction to the subject.

Bob Trubshaw

WALKING THE TALK No.1

£3 from: Save Our Sacred Sites, 9 Edward Kennedy House, Womington Road, London, W10 5FP

Subtitled as 'The Journal of Save Our Sacred Sites', this 25 page A5 offering includes pithy articles from the National Trust property manager responsible for the Avebury area; Professor Ronald Hutton; Clare Prout of the Pagan Hospice and Funeral Trust; a 'group statement' from the Dongas; and several modern-day pagans.

Save Our Sacred Sites was set up in response to the damage inflicted on the stones of West Kennet long barrow by a group of pagans in May 1995 - and the consequent response by the National Trust (custodians of this monument) which included considering the use of security guards to prevent access after dusk.

Walking the Talk No.1 probably succeeds in its objective of trying to bring together the varying interests of archaeologists, tourists, pagans and heritage management groups. It has taken a small step in the direction of informing the pagan community of the damage they unwittingly may cause to archaeological sites by lighting fires and leaving rubbish or 'offerings' - although clearly there is long way to go before this message has been fully conveyed.

The introduction to this inaugural issue is written in the first person although there is no indication as to who is behind

Save Our Sacred Sites.

Walking the Talk is scheduled to appear quarterly and the subscription details seek standing orders, so the organiser(s) clearly want to give the impression that this is not a 'flash in the pan'.

I have no problems with the overt aims of this project but I find it intriguing that there is no attempt to define 'sacred sites'. One suspects that any 'ancient' site which is claimed as sacred by modern-day pagans will *de facto* meet the criteria. It remains to be seen whether ploughed out henges (including, for instance, the massive neolithic enclosure recently discovered near Knighton - see Abstracts this issue) with nothing to be seen on the ground will envince as much enthusiasm as Avebury and other places which have been the subject of copious mumbo-jumbo in New Age and modern pagan books and magazines.

For all the attention devoted to damage at well-known sites, *Walking the Talk* makes no mention of the need for minor archaeological sites - such as numberless standing stones and all-but ploughed-out prehistoric earthworks - to be given the protection they deserve as scheduled monuments, rather than risk being destroyed at any time without notice. No is there any attempt to question the motives of English Heritage - surely a quango in great need of close scrutiny, given the recent leadership by a series of buffoons more interested in advancing their political careers than taking any interest in the sites and the resolving the conflicts inherent in their management.

Above all, will *Walking the Talk* have the strength to 'name names'? The pagan community is small enough to know who are the main culprits of intentional damage (to my knowledge one of the contributors to this issue knows the identity of the group who, in the words of one of those

responsible, 'trashed' the young trees around Nine Ladies stone circle in Derbyshire last year).

A worthy enterprise which, if it has the momentum to sustain the campaign, could produce some useful dialogues over the next few years.

Bob Trubshaw

Books received:

The Modern Numerology John King, Blandford 1996 pbk £8.99

Celtic myths, Celtic legends R.J. Stewart, Blandford 1996 pbk £9.99 (originally published as hdbk 1994)

Psychic protection William Bloom, Piatkus Books 1996 ppk £8.99

Contacting the spirit world Linda Williamson, Piatkus Books, 1996 £8.99

Next Issue

Tree veneration lore
and Green Men
take over!

Jeremy Harte
How old is that old yew?

Peter Hill
Green Men in
Northamptonshire

Philip Quinn
Veneration of trees in Avon

Paul Wain
Derbyshire tree lore

Ruth Wylie
Photographs of little-known
Green Men

plus the usual letters,
abstracts, reviews and
much else.

New Subscription Rates

Observant subscribers will have noted that the price on front cover has been increased from £2.00 to £2.50 and the subscription rates shown on the inside front cover have been increased accordingly.

I am never in a hurry to increase cover prices but paper prices have not reduced sufficiently to offset the massive increases last year and an increase in postage rates is imminent.

Above all, although the number of new subscribers is satisfactory, a much larger number are needed to significantly reduce the cost-per-copy of printing.

All existing subscriptions will, of course, be honoured in full but all subscriptions paid after 1st September will be due at the new rate.

UK subscribers still save £1.00 on the cover price of four issues and ensure that they receive their copies of *At the Edge* promptly on publication.

Notes for Contributors

Articles and letters are welcome for publication on the understanding that they have not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. A preliminary letter summarising proposed ideas is most welcome. Length should not normally exceed 3000 words although, exceptionally, up to 5000 word articles will be considered. Contributors are asked to write for general readers and avoid jargon.

While the editor will offer advice and assistance on matters relating to copyright, articles are accepted for publication solely on the understanding that the contributor is responsible for obtaining copyright clearance for any text (including substantial quotations), illustrations or photographs.

Sources and references must be clearly indicated. Please ensure references include the *correct and full* title, author (with initials or first name), publisher and year of publication. **N.B. In future issues the format for references will change to Harvard numbering system** e.g. (Trubshaw 1996). End notes (i.e. comments other than bibliographical information) should be shown by superscript numbers.

Contributions should be sent, when possible, by e-mail or on IBM PC disc in ASCII or Word for Windows-compatible formats; or on Amstrad PCW 3" or 3.5" discs in Locoscript format. Otherwise send on good old fashioned paper - clear, unmarked typescript suitable for scanning.

Note that published contributions become the joint copyright of the author(s) or artist and the editor of *At the Edge*. If you would like to discuss any of these notes, please contact Bob Trubshaw.

What you receive in return

For published articles contributors are credited with a year's subscription. Contributors of short articles, reprints of 'syndicated' contributions and letters published will be credited with a free issue.

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AT THE EDGE

A good number of people have written to say how much they like the approach of *At the Edge*. Such praise is always appreciated but does not really help where it matters most.

At the Edge is not an academic journal - the subscription rates are a small fraction of those for heavyweight periodicals yet there is no sponsorship and all-but-no advertising. On such shoe-string budgets every subscription really does help.

If you like what you have read in this issue but are not a paid-up subscriber then please reach out for your cheque book *now* - if you are reading this before the 1st September then the old subscription rates still apply (deduct £2.00 from those shown on the inside front cover).

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Heart of Albion Press

SPECIAL

for *At the Edge* readers only

For reasons too tedious to be of interest, a one-time distributor has just returned a small number of out of print Heart of Albion booklets. This is almost certainly your last chance to get your hands on the following gems:

Alby Stone *The Bleeding Lance - Myth, Ritual and the Grail Legend* (£2.95)

Alby Stone *A Splendid Pillar - Images of the Axis Mundi in the Grail Romances* (£2.95)

Alby Stone - *Wyrd - Fate and Destiny in North European Paganism* (£3.00)

T. Tindall Wildridge *Animals of the Church in Wood, Stone and Bronze* (£1.50)

Bob Trubshaw with John Walbridge *The Quest for the Omphalos - Finding the Mystical Middle of England* (£1.50)

Please add 40p p&p (same postage for any quantity).

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Since the start of Heart of Albion Press in 1990 I have attempted to assist other small publishers by listing relevant titles in the Heart of Albion catalogues. However this is leading to a large stock of books with limited sales and will be phased out in the next few months.

A clearance sale with 10% or 20% off almost items while stocks last means (a) you benefit from special prices; (b) I clear my stocks fairly quickly.

Subscribers to *At the Edge* should find a copy of the Clearance Sale catalogue enclosed. Otherwise send an A5 s.a.e. for your own copy.

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